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THE Christian CENTURY

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Lessons in dying

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with Sara Miles

June 25–29, 2012



Sara Miles is the founder and director of the food pantry and director of ministry at Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She is the author of *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead* and *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*. She is a noted speaker, preacher and workshop leader nationally and her writing has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, and on National Public Radio.

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Grieving together

WHEN I BECAME the student pastor of a small church I had no idea what I was getting into. The move from married student housing to a tiny parsonage was, I am ashamed to admit, more about the \$50-a-week free housing and backyard for our infant daughter than about anything else. The first thing that happened after we moved in was that Johnny Johnson died. I faced the situation knowing nothing about funerals; my experience with death had been limited to the loss of a grandmother and an uncle when I was seven.

Now I was a pastor, obliged to respond to a call for help from the family of a dying man. When I arrived at the hospital, Johnny's breathing was labored and sporadic. His wife, Pearl, was beside herself. A son explained that she had not slept for days. She would agree to go home only if I stayed with Johnny during the night. I agreed—and spent a very long night sitting and watching a man die. Occasionally I patted his arm—the only thing I could think of to do.

When he stopped breathing, it was my responsibility to call Pearl. She insisted on seeing her husband one more time, so I drove 20 miles to her house and back to the hospital. When she collapsed wailing into my arms, I had to carry her to the car.

At Johnny's funeral I read the funeral service from my new Book of Common Worship. I preached a sermon, but I don't know what I said. I know that it was brief and that it ended with the message of Romans 8:38–39: nothing, not even death, “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In this issue, Allen Verhey reflects on how church and culture have responded to death and dying, and specifically to the “medicalization of death,” the “death is natural” movement

and the hospice movement. Lucy Bregman examines what ministers have been saying as they try to be faithful and useful at a time of death.

A person who taught me a lot about death was Granger Westberg, a Lutheran pastor on the faculty of both the divinity school and the medical school of the University of Chicago. His 1961 book *Minister and Doctor Meet* is still valuable. In his Religion and Personality class, we learned about Carl Rogers and client-centered therapy. We used to jokingly call it “shut up and listen” therapy, and we had great fun inserting the Rogerian “Do I hear you saying?” into everyday conversation. But the technique was extremely helpful to those of us who had no pastoral experience.

In 1962 Westberg wrote *Good Grief*, a small book that went through at least 16 printings (and was just republished last year in a 50th anniversary edition). He outlined the ten stages of a grief process that moved from initial shock, emotional release, depression, physical distress, panic, guilt, hostility and incapacitation to hope and a return to reality. I immediately recognized the stages as I listened to people in my congregation. Not everyone showed evidence of all ten, but I recognized shock, guilt and anger. It was enormously helpful to know that I did not have to try to talk people out of what they were very naturally feeling and experiencing.

Here is Westberg's conclusion: “It is not right that a person should try to carry on his grief work alone. People through the centuries have found new and unexpected strength in the words, ‘I am with you always.’ So we say, ‘Grieve—not as those who have no hope,’ but please, when you have something worth grieving about, go ahead and grieve.”

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Liberal agony

Robert Westbrook's excellent article on the problems of the Obama administration ("The liberal agony," Sept. 20) misses two important factors. First, even before taking office the Obama administration was swimming against a massive tide of radical right propaganda—a force so strong that Tea Partiers vocally support policies that are contrary to their own best interests.

Second, there is the well-known 2,000-pound elephant in the room—racism. Listen carefully not only to the Obama haters but also to those who claim that they are just against his policies. The stench of racism cannot be ignored.

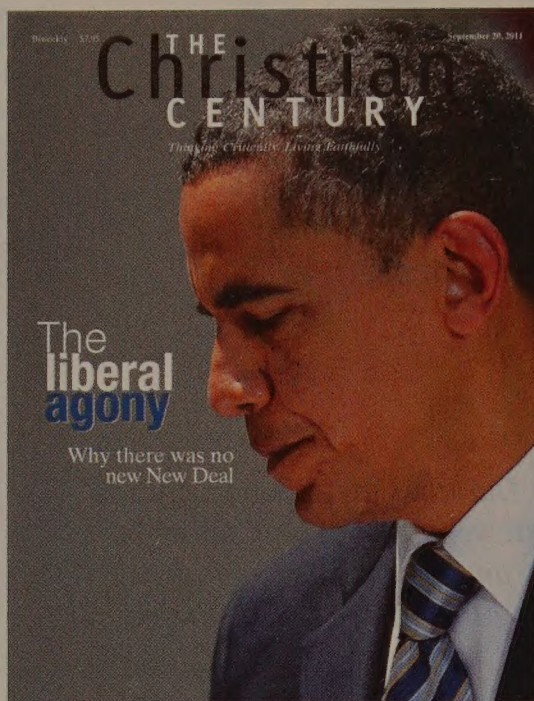
*Peter Kane
Canandaigua, N.Y.*

My expectations for the Obama administration were rather modest, given that his economic proposals as a candidate were not all that progressive, yet I also have found myself extremely disappointed by his meager accomplishments. Worse still has been his inability to articulate a compelling vision of economic justice, or even soundness, that might generate grassroots enthusiasm.

Of course, liberal disillusionment with Obama goes much deeper, inasmuch as he has prosecuted the war in Afghanistan beyond all reason, failed as yet to get us out of Iraq, promoted drone attacks and extrajudicial assassinations, and made little or no attempt to rescind Bush-Cheney policies curtailing civil and human rights, protections and liberties. Yes, he inherited a horrific mess from his predecessors. But if at first it seemed wise and reasonable to give him some slack, those days are now long gone.

*Byron C. Bangert
Bloomington, Ind.*

Westbrook's negative comment about Fox News showed his alliance with a particular group. A truly thoughtful



article would have included some solutions and would not have used the rhetoric of one particular political party (since both are to blame for the present situation). The article was a paean to a bygone era whose solutions have been manipulated so as to be no longer applicable.

*Tom Brayshaw
Fredericksburg, Tex.*

Fundamental Mormonism . . .

I read with some disappointment the October 4 article "Normal Mormons." It is an interesting story that speaks of cultural accommodation as well as the prejudice against Latter-day Saints, but the writer skirted the foundational understanding of the LDS Church.

This church does not recognize any church but itself as Christian, and I am not aware of any Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Protestant communion that recognizes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints as falling within normative Christianity.

While I wish to honor those who find hope and meaning in faiths other than Christianity, I am not yet willing to

accept the claim that the LDS Church is Christian. I wish that the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* offered a deeper discussion of LDS beliefs and theology rather than discussing these issues in the context of cultural tensions.

*Peter Nord
Baltimore, Md.*

May we Christians not respectfully say that Mormons are not Christian? The point of departure for all Christian belief is the Trinity. Mormons do not believe in the traditional and orthodox understanding of this teaching. Rather they posit tritheism or a belief in three gods.

*Leo Ryska
Benet Lake, Wis.*

Caregivers . . .

Thanks so much for Anthony Robinson's "Caregivers' calling" (Oct. 4). His account of his father's blessing of him was very moving. Such moments are not uncommon. People with dementia often perform acts of love.

I am a hospice volunteer in a nursing home. One of my patients, a lady with Alzheimer's called Edie, was unable to articulate words beyond saying "m-m-m." She told me many long stories in m-m-m's—I never got the subject matter, though I think I understood her feelings. One day I wore a red sweater when I went to visit, and Edie said quite clearly, "You look great!" She immediately went back to her m-m-m mode, but she'd given me a huge gift.

I've seen lots of patients reward their caregivers with appreciation and admiration, with real pleasure in seeing them and with great effort in communicating. Those rewards are the acts of love that aren't wasted.

*Linda Dickey
New York, N.Y.*

November 1, 2011

Powerful occupation

The Occupy Wall Street movement has grown immensely since demonstrations began in September. Media coverage has exploded as well, much of it emphasizing the movement's lack of focus. The protesters champion the cause of the nation's poorest 99 percent, whose well-being has been neglected in favor of the wealthy few. But what specific remedies do they propose?

It's hard to build and sustain a popular movement around a specific policy demand. Although the Tea Party movement, for example, was sparked by a single demand—don't let the government bail out homeowners facing foreclosure—this was soon eclipsed by a cacophony of activism. That in turn gave way to a political constituency centered not on an isolated policy position but on a slogan-ready principle: government should be smaller. Rick Santelli's rant on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade didn't achieve its immediate goal—the homeowner bailout program went into effect—but it did galvanize a broader movement.

Occupy Wall Street began with a single demand as well. *Adbusters* magazine proposed demonstrations that would call for “a presidential commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington.” The contrast in venue—a nonprofit magazine versus the largest derivatives exchange in the world—is telling. While the Tea Party includes some grassroots elements, it has often served the interests of the powerful. But Occupy Wall Street is governed via direct democracy, with decisions reached through consensus. Thus it is even less geared for message discipline than the nascent Tea Party was.

As Occupy Wall Street grows, so will the pressure for it to offer a concrete policy agenda—or to align itself with others' agendas. At this stage, however, such a move could take considerable wind out of the movement's sails. As with the Tea Party, the group's long-term power may rest in its ability to articulate and maintain a primary principle—whether that's money-free politics or the need for financial regulation or progressive taxation—rather than in spelling out specific laws. A popular movement's role is to awaken people and jump-start democracy.

Whatever its explicit message, Occupy Wall Street has made a powerful statement with its very mode of existence. Newcomers don't face an ideological litmus test; their protest signs aren't edited. People of diverse backgrounds share food; nurses share their skills; everyone has an equal voice. In other words, the group is making a democratic witness by its behavior, even if its message isn't always unified. This approach might be foreign to political operatives and political reporters, but Christians should find it quite familiar.

Whatever its message, Occupy Wall Street has made a powerful statement with its very mode of existence.

CENTURY marks

SELFLESS PRAYER: Gabrielle Apollon, whose mother emigrated from Haiti to Canada as a child, was in Haiti when the earthquake struck in January 2010. She quickly became involved in treating the wounded. With few supplies and no medical training, Apollon couldn't do much. Instead, she tried to comfort the wounded by holding their hands, singing to them and praying for them. When she asked 14-year-old Emmanuella if she would like to pray, Emmanuella volunteered to pray first for Apollon. Barely mentioning her own pain, Emmanuella prayed that God would be able to use Apollon and herself too. "God sent you here to be with me," she told Apollon (*Dissent*, Summer).

BAD DREAMS: When Robert Jay Lifton embarked on a project of interviewing Nazi death camp doctors, he started having bad dreams in which he was in a place like Auschwitz along with family members. He talked with Elie

Wiesel, an Auschwitz survivor, about the dreams. Wiesel's response: "Good, now you can do the study." Lifton understood Wiesel to be saying that he had to inhabit the subject psychologically, not just academically. That was his way of paying his dues (*Witness to an Extreme Century*, Free Press).

WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED:

The Memphis-based Methodist Le Bonheur hospital system is working with 400 churches to ensure that its patients have a support system while in the hospital and when they are discharged. Hospital staff called "navigators" work with liaisons in each congregation that is part of the Congregational Health Network to arrange for visits, transportation and follow-up care. The mortality rate for those in the program from 2007 to 2009 was 50 percent lower than for those not in it, and readmission rates were 20 percent lower. The hospi-

tal system says 70 percent of its patients belong to churches (*Washington Post*, October 3).

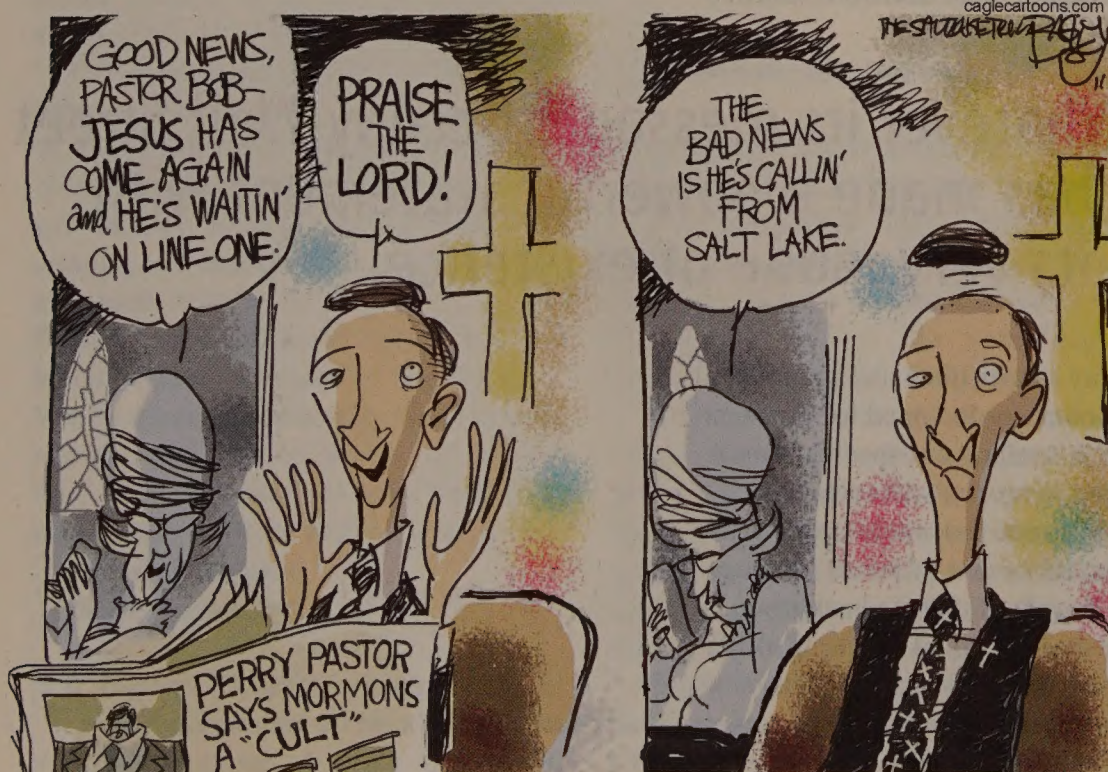
IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEUR:

Here is a headline you may not have seen: "Steve Jobs Dies: He Was the Most Famous Arab in the World." The father of the innovative head of Apple was from Syria. Jobs's parents, who weren't married, gave him up for adoption. Despite the political unrest plaguing Syria, many Syrians celebrated Jobs's accomplishments when he died. One Syrian admitted: "I think that if he had lived in Syria, he would not have been able to achieve any of this, or else he would have chosen to leave Syria" (The Lede, *New York Times*, October 6).

OLD IMMIGRATION STORY:

Benjamin Franklin's freethinking ways didn't include tolerance for other ethnic groups, especially German immigrants. He wondered why "*Palatine Boors* [that is, Germans] be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and be herding together [to] establish their languages and manners to exclusion of ours? Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language [or] customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion" (John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?* Westminster John Knox).

HEAD OF THE CLASS: Harvard comes out on top in a *Times Higher Education* ranking of the best 200 universities in the world. No British universities made the top five. In this ranking, less weight was given to tradition and



reputation and more to objective measures such as the influence of research. This shift raised the rank of several Chinese and South Korean universities. The top ten universities are Harvard, California Institute of Technology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, Princeton, Cambridge, Oxford, University of California (Berkeley), Imperial College London and Yale (*Guardian*, September 16).

BIG HISTORY: Students at Dominican University of California are required to take a sequence of four courses in Big History, a multidisciplinary approach that begins with the origins of the universe and looks ahead to the future of the planet. Half of the course covers eras prior to human history. There is a movement to teach Big History on other campuses, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has funded a project to teach it at the high school level. An International Big History Association was formed last year, and a conference and journal are to follow (*Inside Higher Ed*, October 7).

CARDINAL PROPHECY: In March 2003, Pope John Paul II sent a letter to President George W. Bush trying to discourage him from invading Iraq and overthrowing Saddam Hussein. The letter was delivered in person by Cardinal Pio Laghi, a Bush family friend. President Bush, without opening the letter, set it on a table and launched into a defense of war against Iraq, saying he believed it was God's will. The cardinal told the president three things would happen if Iraq were invaded: it would cause many deaths and injuries on both sides; a civil war would ensue; and the U.S. would have difficulty extricating itself from the war (*Vatican Insider*, September 30).

PEACE EFFORTS: Former President Jimmy Carter thinks it was a mistake for the U.S. to veto the bid in the United Nations for Palestinian statehood. He argued that President Obama could make good on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize by backing the move for Palestinian statehood (*Haaretz*, October 6).

“For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?’ And whenever the answer has been no for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.”

— Steve Jobs, in his 2005 commencement address at Stanford after he discovered he had pancreatic cancer, from which he died last month [Stanford.edu].

“I’ll believe that corporations are people when Texas executes one.”

— Kel Munger, blogger, commenting on the Occupy Wall Street protests [Sacramento News & Review, September 20]

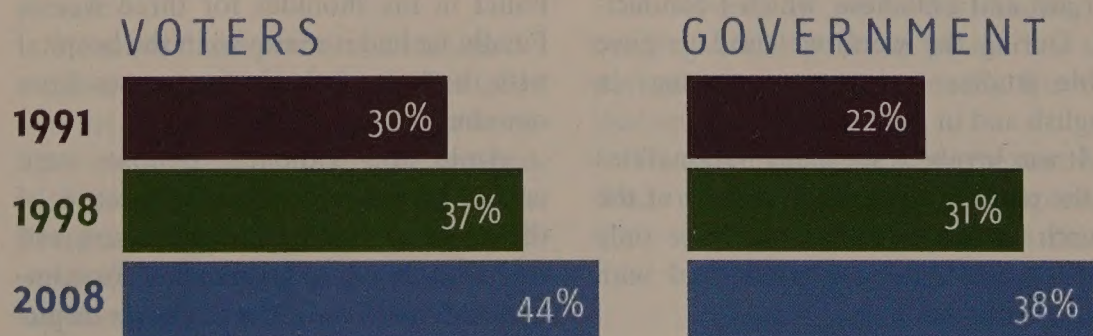
CHURCH COVER BLOWN: As commodity prices soar, thieves are targeting British churches and other institutions, taking copper lightning rods, lead rain pipes, bronze statues, iron gates, even church bells and entire roofs. “Boom conditions in China, India and Brazil have created an incredible demand for lead and copper,” said a representative of a private company that insures about 90 percent of churches in England and Wales. “Church roofs are often the target, threatening some churches with bankruptcy,” she said. The price of copper came close to US\$10,000 a ton earlier this year, having fallen as low as \$2,825 a ton in December 2008 due to the

financial crisis affecting demand (ENI).

GERMAN SPIRITS: New guidelines issued by the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Germany, that country’s largest Protestant body, advise parishioners not to invest in companies that make hard liquor, though beer and wine producers are fine. The guidelines are meant to help investors invest their money wisely but morally in the wake of the financial crisis that has roiled world markets since 2007. The guidelines also discourage investing in companies that manufacture guns or pornography or in countries that are considered dictatorships or present a risk to the environment (RNS).

Religion and politics

Percent who strongly agree religious leaders **should not** try to influence:



Source: Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton University Press)

Tripoli priest Hamdy Sedky Daoud

Caught in a revolution

HAMDY SEDKY DAOUD

is a priest at the Anglican Church of Christ the King in Tripoli. A native of Egypt, he studied at the Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary in Cairo and has a diploma from Chichester Theological College in England. During the uprising against Muammar Qaddafi, Daoud tried to address issues of power in Libya and the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that affected his congregation, most of them foreigners. Daoud was reached by e-mail.

How long you have been at Christ the King and what are your ministries there?

I have been at the church since March 2008, and I have been the priest in charge for three years. I serve a multinational congregation—we have Indians, Pakistanis, Nigerians and Egyptians worshipping with us. We also had many Westerners before the uprising.

We used to have two main English services on Friday and Sunday every week. On Friday after the 10:30 a.m. service we have had an Asian fellowship and worship time, conducted by our Indian priest, Father Vasihar Ehen Baskaran, and an African fellowship conducted by our Nigerian lay ministers. On Friday evening we used to have an Arabic worship service for Egyptians, Syrians and Lebanese, which I conducted. During the week we used to have Bible studies and prayer meetings in English and in Arabic.

It was lovely to see many nationalities in the church; it is a small picture of the church in heaven! Now we have only English and Arabic services, and with reduced numbers.

What happened to your congregation during the civil war?

Many of our foreign members went home. Some people lost their jobs because many companies, schools and embassies closed down. I praise God for those who stayed with us during the conflict. I continued to make pastoral visits, and, in addition to the lectionary, I preached from the epistle to the Hebrews. I found this epistle very relevant and encouraging for those who live and suffer in what to them is a strange land.

What have been the most difficult moments during the conflict?

One was when a Nigerian girl from church came to me asking for money to

“Nobody asked us to close our churches or evacuate. We should appreciate our Libyan brothers.”

help her travel to Italy by ship. She told me that this was her last hope. I also knew a Nigerian man who had a bullet in his shoulder and was very afraid to go to the hospital lest he be accused of supporting the government. He endured the bullet in his shoulder for three weeks. Finally, he had it removed in the hospital with the help of the Indian nurses from our church.

Amid the violence, people were unable to come to church because of their fear or lack of transportation and fuel, and they had no Internet for communications. But God was always inspiring us through his word. He gave me the relevant words for preaching. He has given us the strength to face our testing



time and uncertainties with faith and hope.

The revolution in Egypt that ousted President Mubarak displayed a lot of cooperation between Christians and Muslims. Has it been similar in Libya?

Yes. We as Christian leaders showed our fellow Libyans our love and solidarity by praying for them continually. We urged our people to stay and do their best at

their work, especially doctors, nurses and teachers. Nobody asked us to close our churches or evacuate. We should appreciate our Libyan brothers and thank God for their tolerance of our different faith during their difficult situation.

What do you see in the future for Christian-Muslim relations?

We are very keen to continue our Christian-Muslim dialogue. We believe that dialogue narrows the gap between people of different faiths. We also trust that dialogue should work for the development of people and help provide for social needs.


What do you envision for the future of

Libya? How do you see the role of Christians?

Muslims in Libya have always been moderates, and I am expecting that to continue. Libya was the first Arabic

Islamic country to initiate interfaith dialogue, and I pray that it will continue to be a very good example to the Islamic world.

I thank all the saints of Christ who lifted us up with prayers before God's

mercy seat. We have been encouraged every day to come to the Way, Christ, and we have found his mercy for forgiveness and grace for survival. 

— Amy Frykholm

When Hollywood came calling

Take the money and run?

by Matt Fitzgerald

THE DAY AFTER Easter my church received a surprise visit from a Hollywood location scout. He offered us \$10,000 to shut down our sanctuary for three days so that his company could use it to film the wedding scene from an upcoming Adam Sandler movie. The film's plot involves a teenager who impregnates his schoolteacher (the Mary Kay Letourneau story played for comic effect). The wedding scene takes place years later, when the offspring of this illicit union is a grown man getting married. Our sanctuary would be featured in a scene that included a fistfight between a priest and a worshiper whose telephone repeatedly interrupts the marriage ceremony.

I'm sure that I'm not the only pastor who's been tempted to throw a punch at a wedding ceremony cell phone user. That bit resonated with me. And I've seen enough Adam Sandler movies to know that the funniest scene from any of his films is the fistfight he had with Bob Barker on a golf course in *Happy Gilmore*. The thought of paying homage to that particular ridiculousness right in our sanctuary made me smile.

Moreover, the offer happened to arrive on the same day that our office staff spent hours stuffing hundreds of envelopes announcing the kickoff of our latest capital campaign—an effort to raise \$100,000 quickly in order to

renovate our Sunday school facility during the summer.

So I thought about saying yes. And then I remembered what a pain it is to rent the church out for *anything*. Over the years I've come to regret leasing space for quinceañeras, Suzuki violin recitals, 50th wedding anniversaries and politicians' birthday parties. There are always spills, odd requests, demanding guests and insurance riders. At its best,

In my church a pastor has the right to turn down money. But \$60,000?

the church is good at being the church. In my experience we don't do much else well. So if we don't make it as a good banquet hall, what chance did we stand to be the site of a major motion picture?

Beneath these practical concerns lay a more fundamental anxiety. For good and for ill my church is a classic main-line, main-street, tall-steeple, in-bed-with-the-larger-culture sort of place. Sectarian appeals carry very little weight with me or with the members of my congregation. Even when I'm the one stating the case, I rarely find myself persuaded. But in this instance, I found myself with nothing to say but

“Hollywood? That's just not who we are.”

I am not the kind of Christian who would boycott a movie (I might wind up watching this one). But the church I serve is not mine, and I found myself wanting to protect its true owner from the world.

Because I was barely able to convince myself of this, and was certainly unable to make the case in language

that would convince the pragmatists I serve, I didn't try to explain myself. I just said no to the location scout. It felt good. And then Hollywood called back and offered us \$60,000.

According to my understanding of congregational polity, a pastor has the authority to turn down money. But not that much money.

We convened our deacons the next day. When the meeting began I was perplexed. Sixty thousand dollars would not determine the future of our church, but it would

Matt Fitzgerald is senior minister of Wellesley Hills Congregational Church (UCC) in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

certainly make things much easier in the short run. Still, I had reservations. Uncertain of what to do, I stayed on the sidelines, frustrated at my own irresolution and slightly embarrassed that my scruples seemed to have a \$50,000 price tag.


At the start of the meeting our senior deacon took a straw poll and found that 18 of the people in the room were in favor of accepting the offer. Five were opposed. These five felt strongly, arguing that no matter how lighthearted the treatment might be, our church should not be involved in a story that gets laughs from the sexual exploitation of an adolescent. But this was a decidedly minority opinion. The notion of turning down “free money” just as we needed to

raise money did not make sense to most of our deacons. We spent nearly two hours discussing how difficult it is to find funds in a down economy . . . what a powerful impact this unexpected windfall might have on the children of our church . . . how beautiful our Sunday school might look.

We talked and talked, yet not one mind was changed. It looked as if we would have to settle for a lack of consensus—one that carried a nice payoff. We would take the money. After that we would try to patch things up with the people who were offended.

Then all of a sudden one of our longtime deacons said, “Look—it seems as if saying yes to this offer is going to hurt

some members of the congregation. Not most people. Obviously not the majority. But some people. So I guess the question isn’t about a movie. It’s about us. Is \$60,000 worth hurting some of our members?”

Five minutes later the deacons voted unanimously to turn down the offer even though most of them thought we should accept it. We went from polarized to selfless in a matter of seconds. I have mouthed unanswered prayers inviting Jesus to join our meetings dozens of times. I have interrupted agendas to speak confidently about his presence when he is nowhere to be found. This time I kept my mouth shut, and he walked right in. 

A lawyer's journey to church

Due diligence

by James A. Harnish

“CAN I GET to know Jesus without the church?” The 54-year-old attorney asked the question with the curiosity of a prospective home buyer checking out a new neighborhood. Larry was one of those people who are drawn toward Jesus but not at all sure they are ready to be a part of a church.

There was no hostility in Larry’s question. He had not rejected religion; he simply didn’t need it. He had moved along the typical path of an upwardly mobile professional, his life consumed by work. He had not had personal contact with any faith since childhood.

I’ve been drawn to people like Larry in every community I’ve served: college town, rural community, suburb—and now in a century-old urban church. In each of these settings I’ve found people who know that they are not wired to be

fundamentalists. They are turned off by the conservative Christian voices that dominate the media. They are appalled by the financial and sexual scandals in the news. They are not interested in self-help religion or the prosperity gospel. They are not impressed by political ideology that masquerades as Christianity whether it comes from the right or the left. They really don’t care about denominational squabbles or process.

They are, however, drawn to an expression of the Christian faith that makes sense in their brains and a difference in their lives. They are willing to be engaged in a spiritual journey that is rooted in the central content of the faith if they have space to question, think and come to their own conclusions. They are energized by a community that demonstrates its faith by actively addressing

the needs of the community and the world. They are easily bored and want a place where they can experience hope and joy.

Whether they realize it or not, they are searching for a vibrantly alive expression of the mainline Protestant tradition. They are often surprised when they find it, and if they do, the discovery usually comes at a transitional point in their lives.

For Larry, the discovery came with the diagnosis of a stage-four malignant tumor. He confronted the disease in the same methodical way he practiced law: he made a list. One question on his list was about who would preside at his funeral if the cancer killed him. Then he started shopping for a pastor.

That’s when he turned to Jessica. He had practiced law with her for nearly a decade. Jessica has never flaunted her

faith or waved a religious flag in his face, but he said that she is so real about her faith that he knew that if he ever thought about religion, he'd check out the one she practiced.

Donald English, for many years the spiritual leader of Methodism in Great Britain, said that the world doesn't need more salespersons for the gospel, just more free samples. Jessica was a free sample for Larry. She confirmed that the best advertisement for the Christian faith is a well-lived life.

Larry came to check out the religious neighborhood in which Jessica lived and I served as pastor and asked, "Can I get to know Jesus without the church?"

My first response was yes. All you have to do is read the story, I told him, and yes, I believe that Christ is risen and

people actually come? Could we be sued for false advertising?"

But I was glad that I could tell Larry that one of the core values of our congregation is that we are open-minded and that we really try to live by it. While we are deeply committed to those things that are at the center of the faith—the gospel, the Apostles' Creed, the mission of a church in the Wesleyan tradition—we allow for the different ways that people apply the gospel to the concerns that are around the circumference of our life together.

I told Larry we believe that doubt is not the opposite of faith, that honest doubt is an essential element in a constantly growing faith.

By the end of our conversation, Larry was starting to believe that this might be the faith neighborhood in which he could take up residence. He asked, "What do I do now?"

I invited him to an early morning men's group, and two weeks later Larry showed up. "I read those Gospels and I really like Jesus," he said. "This guy is cool." He joined the conversation with an amazing openness and volunteered to lead the next discussion.

Larry's honesty and the way the guys in that group received him remind me of the role that small groups—Wesley called them "class meetings"—played in the early Methodist movement. They were settings in which conversion happened and people were nurtured in the faith. From these class meetings, Christians were sent out to confront the economic injustices of 18th-century England.

The next time Larry and I met, he said, "I get the impression that I should be baptized. What's that about?" We discussed the meaning of baptism and worked around his chemo treatments to schedule his baptism. On a Sunday morning, Jessica was there along with some of the guys from the men's group. These same men surrounded Larry and his wife with support and prayer when he went to the Mayo Clinic for major surgery.

The story isn't over. Larry hasn't formally become a member of the church. He is the first to admit that we don't know how the cancer treatments will come out. But he is quick to say that whatever happens, he is facing it with new peace, strength and hope because he found Jesus and a new home called the church.

CC

"I get the impression I should be baptized," Larry said. "What's that about?"

alive in this world and has an odd way of showing up in unexpected places. Sadly, I thought to myself, there are churches where there hasn't been any evidence of his presence for years.

Then I told Larry that I was also convinced that there is no way to grow into the fullness of Christ's presence and to be deeply engaged in his work without sharing life with other disciples in some version of this imperfect body called church.

Larry asked about the congregation I serve. Was there room in it for a guy like him? That's not always an easy question for me to answer.

When the United Methodist Church launched a television advertising campaign with the theme "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors," I was cynical enough to ask, "What if it works? What if

When I responded with "How do you usually work on questions like this?" he replied, "I'm an attorney. I love to do research." "OK," I said, "your first assignment is to read the four Gospels, followed by Henri Nouwen's book *Letters to Marc about Jesus*." It's my favorite way to introduce people to Jesus.

Lexical reverie

Now say "public library" three times fast
and feel your voice give corners to the air.
Now hear the funny names my son has carried:
Boots and Gusto, Bips and Bixby, Mr. Sassafras

or Picklefeather—try that one on for size.
The skies in our heads are bright with characters,
song's constellations, linguistic cataract.
Steadily hewn, honed by angel tongues, words realize.

Brett Foster

James A. Harnish is senior pastor at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida, and author of *Strength for the Broken Places* (Abingdon).

Three women activists take peace prizes

Leymah Gbowee, a Liberian activist who helped bring her country out of a brutal civil war and one of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winners, says the best way to achieve global peace is to start in local communities.

"It is time for us to do justice in our communities. . . . One day the world's problems will meet you at your doorstep," she said October 7 at the Interchurch Center in New York. Coincidentally, she was there at a long-planned event organized by the National Council of Churches when the prize winners were announced.

Gbowee, citing the examples of peace and justice campaigners such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, said she does not believe it is possible to practice nonviolent action without some connection to a higher

power. "My faith has really helped me," said Gbowee, a member of the Lutheran Church in Liberia.

The Nobel committee announced October 7 that Gbowee, Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Yemen's Tawakkul Karman, who leads opposition to dictatorial president Ali Abdullah Saleh, would share the prize. Faith groups worldwide hailed the recognition of activists for justice and women's rights.

The Norwegian Nobel committee recognized Karman, a Yemeni journalist and human rights advocate, as representative of thousands of activists, including women, in the Arab Spring from Tunisia to Syria.

Johnson Sirleaf, a member of First United Methodist Church, Monrovia, Liberia, in 2006 was the first woman to be elected a head of state in modern Africa. In her inauguration speech, she said: "Women have endured injustices and inhumane treatment; yet, it is the women who have labored and advocated for peace."

The peace prize announcement, which was made only days before Johnson Sirleaf, 72, was up for reelection October 11, was reportedly called "provocative" by her chief rival for the office, Winston Tubman, a Harvard-educated lawyer. If a runoff vote is needed, it will be scheduled for November.

Bishop John Innis, who leads Liberia's 170,000 United Methodists, introduced Johnson Sirleaf to the 2008 United Methodist quadrennial conference in Fort Worth, Texas, where she addressed the delegates.

Gbowee, who organized Christian and Muslim women to challenge Liberia's warlords, was honored for her efforts across ethnic and religious divid-

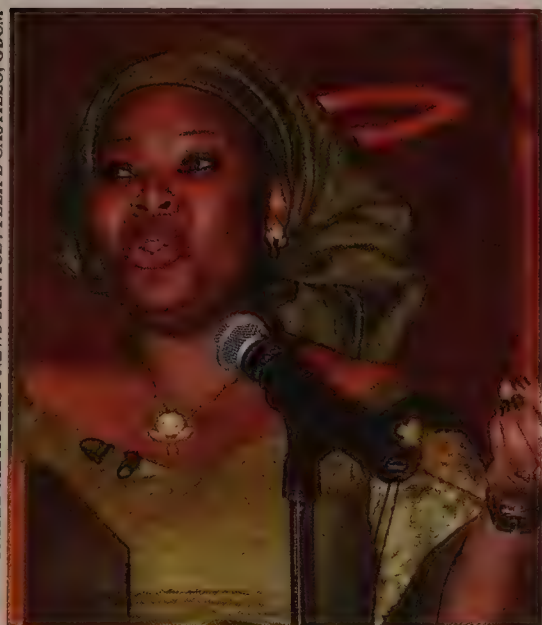


LIBERIAN METHODIST: Peace prize laureate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, elected president of Liberia after the African country had reached peace following a brutal civil war, addressed the United Methodist Church's 2008 General Conference.

ing lines to bring an end to the country's 14-year war and to ensure women's participation in elections. She trained as a trauma counselor during the war and worked with former child soldiers. The Liberian civil war ended in 2003.

Speaking of Johnson Sirleaf, Gbowee said every time "she sees me coming, she's weary" because "I always say, 'Madame President, you need to do this, this, this.'" But, Gbowee added, "We have a good professional relationship, like mother and daughter."

Gbowee, who was to return to Liberia after the reception, was in the U.S. to promote her memoir, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War*. Her story is featured in a documentary, *Women, War and Peace*, which premiered in October on Public Broadcasting stations. —Chris Herlinger, ENInews



PEACEMAKER AND WRITER: Leymah Gbowee was at New York's Interchurch Center just hours after she learned that she had been named a co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. She spoke at an event hosted by the National Council of Churches to promote her new book.

Plain-talk Bible debuts with mainstream backing

by John Dart
News Editor

The Common English Bible, the newest Bible on the block, is what the name suggests—a translation into commonly spoken English. It is not the first edition to move in that direction. But it's probably the first to use contractions so extensively—whether it's King David, Jesus or Paul speaking. Except when announcing the Ten Commandments, even God says “don't” in giving Moses added prohibitions for the Israelites.

This new Bible is not as wordy as others—about 30,000 fewer words—apparently because of its use of contractions and its attention to sentence length, among other factors.

Like other recent Bible versions, the CEB substitutes *brothers and sisters* for *brethren*, to mention one of the easiest steps toward inclusive language. But the CEB may not have to dodge the slings and arrows of biblical fundamentalists that greeted the evangelically aimed Today's New International Version in recent years. For one thing, the Common English Bible was endorsed in April for use at the eight-campus Fuller Theological Seminary along with the New Revised Standard Version and TNIV (expected to be replaced by a new NIV edition).

Fuller professor Joel B. Green is the New Testament editor for CEB, but he said it was cofaculty member Daniel Kirk, another CEB translator, who commended the new Bible to the seminary. Kirk said the translations are “academically excellent” and reflect “the reality that the communities for which the Bible was written consist of both men and women.”

The CEB is clearly aimed at the broad middle of Protestantism. The Christian Resources Development Corporation, formed as a distinct corporation in Nashville by the United Methodist Publishing House, promotes the CEB as a “common ground” project. It used 120

translators from two dozen different denominations.

Recognizing that a gender-inclusive and innovative translation would be most welcome to mainline churches, publishers for five denominations in the National Council of Churches serve as CEB's “sponsors.” Besides the Methodist-related Abingdon Press, the group includes the Presbyterians' Westminster John Knox Press, the Disciples of Christ's Chalice Press, the United Church of Christ's Pilgrim Press and the Episcopalians' Church Publishing, Inc.

Spokespersons for the Presbyterian, Disciples and UCC publishers said they have had little involvement in the CEB so far other than having translators from their denomination working on CEB editions. However, bishops, clergy and laity at the Episcopal General Convention next July in Indianapolis will receive CEBs in hopes that the new translation will be authorized for use in the denomination, according to Davis Perkins, who heads Church Publishing, Inc.

Involved in the CEB project from the start, Perkins said: “I have no doubt the CEB will find broad utility in the church and take its place alongside the NRSV as an esteemed translation that will enrich all dimensions of church life.”

Some scholars who requested anonymity have wondered if the CEB project will impact NRSV sales given the long association of mainline churches with the RSV and NRSV—translations sponsored by the National Council of Churches.

“There is always room for fresh and contemporary translations,” said David M. Dobson, executive director of the Presbyterians' WJK Press, adding that new versions enhance further understanding of scripture. “We continue to be supportive of the NRSV translation.”

“We're not irked by the Common English Bible project,” said the NCC's media relations specialist, Philip Jenks, in an e-mail interview. “We made our peace long ago with the fact that there are other versions of the Bible on the market,” Jenks said.

New Testament scholar Richard L. Jeske, who is on the NCC's translation

and utilization committee, said, “I think the jury is still out on the Common English Bible.” Jeske said that the CEB's apparent target audience is U.S. Protestants, whereas the RSV/NRSV also used Catholic and Orthodox translators. “Sales of the RSV continue to be robust internationally.”

The CEB “never arose in our discussions” when the committee met in February, he said. The NCC group has been discussing whether to revise the 1989 NRSV in a new edition or to launch a new translation, but has not yet reached a decision, he said.

One remarkable aspect of the CEB was its swift production. In contrast to the deliberate pace of past biblical translations, this one took only four years from its 2007 start to the debut of the full Bible in August. Though hundreds of readability experts provided feedback, the computer age sped up the process, officials said.

Credit for getting the CEB out so fast—the New Testament appeared in print a year ago—is given to associate publisher Paul Franklyn, who earned his doctorate in Old Testament at Vanderbilt University and has specialized in developing and editing various products at Abingdon Press. Franklyn was the CEB's “spiritual and intellectual leader” who guided all facets of the project, said Neil M. Alexander, publisher of CEB and the United Methodist Publishing House.

Franklyn indicated in an e-mail that any suggestion of a rivalry between the CEB and the National Council of Churches is misleading. Abingdon continues to contract with the NCC for use of its NRSV translations and has published the NCC's *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* for decades. Mainline Protestants are not told by their denominations that they must use a particular translation of the Bible, he added.

With more than 500,000 copies already in print, the Common English Bible has specialty editions in the works. A Bible dictionary and a Daily Companion Bible are next, plus a reference edition in January, a children's edition in August and a study Bible in print by fall 2013.

The 'Occupy' movement includes religious groups

As waves of demonstrators descended on New York City to unite with others to protest corporate greed, they were met by typical sounds of raucous youth-led protests: drum beats, police sirens and shouted political slogans. They didn't expect to hear hymns.

Yet protesters rounding the corner of Zuccotti Park encountered dozens of white-robed worshipers singing spirituals and blessing the demonstrators while holding signs reading "Blessed are the poor" and brandishing handmade Christian crosses.

The group, calling themselves the Protest Chaplains, had traveled from Boston to join the Occupy Wall Street movement, which claims to advocate for "the 99 percent" of Americans against the "1 percent" who control much of the country's wealth.

The Protest Chaplains, a loose group of mostly Christian students, seminarians and laypeople organized through Facebook, expressed support in early October for the movement the best they knew how: through their faith.

"In a group that had a lot of bandanas and black hoodies, we stood out," said Marisa Egerstrom, an organizer of the group and doctoral student at Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. "But people kept coming up to us and saying, 'You know, you are the first Christians I've seen at a protest . . . on our side.'"

As police helicopters hovered overhead, seminarian Rix Thorsell, wearing a clerical collar, marched on October 5 with other members of Brooklyn's Greenpoint Reformed Church in a protest that has captured national attention. "Jesus stood with the 99 percent [of society that is not wealthy]," said Thorsell, a student at New York's Union Theological Seminary. "He didn't support the establishment. He ate and lived among the poor."

Also joining the protests were members of Brooklyn Congregations United, a grassroots interfaith group assisting those facing bank foreclosures on their homes. Tom Martinez, a United Church of Christ



ANTIGREED PROTESTS: Members of the Protest Chaplains group traveled to New York from Boston to support the Occupy Wall Street movement.

minister, said faith communities are involved in the protests for varied reasons, including worries "about the growing and unchecked power of corporations."

Religious protesters, once a staple of American progressivism, have become a rare sight at liberal demonstrations in recent years. But as the Occupy Wall Street movement rapidly expands to Boston, Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles and other cities, progressive religious groups are playing an increasingly visible role.

Chicago-based Interfaith Worker Justice, a labor advocacy group with ties to religious communities, said it is supportive of the activism. "People of faith may not all agree with or even understand everything the Wall Street protesters are saying. But these protests are a teachable moment," Kim Bobo, the group's executive director, said in a statement.

While many of the religious elements of the Occupy movement have been spearheaded by laypeople and students organized through social media, more established clergy are starting to follow the lead of groups like the Protest Chaplains.

Brian Merritt, senior pastor at the Palisades Community Church in Washington, became affiliated with the Occupy movement after delivering peanut butter to Occupy K Street demonstrators in Washington's McPherson Square. He was surprised, however, when organizers asked that he hold a "wholeness" worship service

on behalf of the protesters. "I was just really shocked," Merritt said. "But God is so free, God can institute the church wherever God thinks the church can be."

On October 9, a diverse group of New York religious leaders marched to Zuccotti Park carrying a handmade golden calf fashioned to resemble the iconic bull statue near the New York Stock Exchange.

"We think Wall Street has become idolatrous," said Donna Schaper, senior minister at New York's Judson Memorial Church and one of more than 50 clergy who joined the New York protest, independent of the Protest Chaplains. "I'm not saying God is against the people of Wall Street, but I think God is sick of Wall Street taking more than they deserve." Schaper stressed the interfaith aspect of the demonstration in various cities.

One of the Muslim prayer services in Occupy Boston was led by Nuri Friedlander, the Muslim chaplain at Harvard University, who said his involvement was a natural extension of his religious commitment.

"One of the principles of my faith is to stand up for those who are oppressed, to give to those in need, to bear witness," Friedlander said. Ryan Adams, a student at Harvard Divinity School and lead organizer of several Jewish services at Occupy Boston, echoed Friedlander's spiritual call. —RNS, ENI

Civil rights legend Fred Shuttlesworth dies

Fred Shuttlesworth, the last of the “Big Three” of the civil rights movement along with Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr., died October 5 in Birmingham, Alabama. He was 89.

To the general public Shuttlesworth was the least well known of the three cofounders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, but few advanced its agenda of nonviolent resistance at greater risk. By his own count Shuttlesworth was bombed twice, beaten into unconsciousness and jailed more than 35 times.

“Fred Shuttlesworth did not become a martyr, and it was not for lack of trying,” biographer Andrew Manis said in the *Birmingham News*.

Manis, a professor at Macon State College, first met Shuttlesworth when his uncle was owner of the construction company that built the Greater New Light Baptist Church’s new sanctuary in 1978. At the time a master of divinity student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Manis arranged to have Shuttlesworth speak at the predominantly white seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Manis, who later earned his doctorate at Southern, interviewed Shuttlesworth many times and wrote the acclaimed biography *A Fire You Can’t Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham’s Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth*.

Born March 18, 1922, in Montgomery County, Alabama, Shuttlesworth moved to Birmingham at age three, where he lived with his mother and stepfather. He studied for the ministry at Selma University and by 1949 was preaching at Selma’s First Baptist Church for \$10 a week.

In 1953 he took over as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham. He became an activist in the city, calling for the hiring of African-American police officers and joining voter registration efforts of the NAACP.

He became known as the chief nemesis of Bull Connor, Birmingham’s racist police chief, whose use of police dogs and fire hoses on the Freedom Riders in 1962 helped build public support for the

civil rights movement and inspired other similar campaigns.

Shuttlesworth compared himself to Daniel in the lion’s den and said the only reason he could think of that he survived the civil rights struggle while others like King and Medgar Evers were assassinated was God’s protection.

President Obama, who once pushed Shuttlesworth’s wheelchair across the Edmund Pettus Bridge near Selma, Alabama, to commemorate a march for voter rights in 1965, voiced sadness at news of his death.

“As one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Reverend Shuttlesworth dedicated his life to advancing the cause of justice for all Americans,” Obama said. “He was a testament to the strength of the human spirit. And today we stand on his shoulders, and the shoulders of all those who marched and sat and lifted their voices to help perfect our union.” —Bob Allen, ABP

Churches lose fight over Alabama immigration law

A federal judge jolted the national immigration debate by approving most parts of Alabama’s aggressive immigration law which some religious leaders have called the “meanest” in the nation.

In a ruling September 28 that was hailed by many state officials, U.S. District Judge Sharon Lovelace Blackburn refused to block much of Alabama’s far-reaching immigration law from going into effect.

Blackburn’s decision came after three separate challenges were filed by the U.S. Department of Justice; Catholic, Episcopal and United Methodist bishops; and a coalition of civil rights groups, unions and individuals who said they would be harmed by the law. The Justice Department argued that immigration law enforcement rests with the federal government and that states could not set up their own systems.

The U.S. judge disagreed, saying Alabama’s efforts mirrored the federal government’s or were complementary.

“Today is a dark day for Alabama,” said Mary Bauer, legal director for the Southern Poverty Law Center. “This

decision not only places Alabama on the wrong side of history but also demonstrates that the rights and freedoms so fundamental to our nation and its history can be manipulated by hate and political agendas—at least for a time.”

United Methodist Bishop William Willimon, who had crusaded against the law, continues to oppose it but said it was “good news” that Blackburn struck down a provision that made it illegal to harbor or transport an undocumented immigrant. Willimon and other religious leaders said the provision would have hampered churches’ ability to minister to all, regardless of immigration status.

“We will continue to provide food, shelter, transportation, housing and the church’s sacraments to all of God’s people, regardless of race, class, or citizenship status,” he said in a statement.

Similar but less far-reaching laws in Arizona, Georgia, Indiana and Utah have been temporarily blocked by federal courts, but Blackburn found that Alabama’s laws were generally consistent with the intent of Congress, which gave the states a supporting role in immigration law enforcement.

She also pointedly disagreed with court rulings that blocked Arizona’s immigration law on the grounds that immigration law enforcement is the unique responsibility of the federal government.

The judge refused to block a portion of the law that authorizes police to conduct immigration checks during routine traffic stops. She also left in place a new system that requires public schools to check students’ immigration status upon enrollment.

Blackburn blocked parts of the law that bar illegal immigrants from seeking work, as well as a new traffic penalty for motorists who stop in the roadway to hire day laborers. The judge’s decision emphasized that blocking a law before it is implemented is a drastic step that requires clear evidence that the Constitution and will of Congress would be violated.

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley said the law, even without sections that Blackburn blocked, is the “strongest” immigration law in the country. But he also promised to fight to see all sections take effect. “With those parts that were upheld, we have the strongest immigration law in this country,” he said. —RNS

Chaplains can conduct nuptials for gays

Military chaplains may officiate at same-sex marriage ceremonies on and off military bases, the Pentagon has announced, in a move that closely followed the repeal of a ban on openly gay service members.

"A military chaplain may participate in or officiate at any private ceremony, whether on or off a military installation, provided that the ceremony is not prohibited by applicable state and local law," wrote Undersecretary of Defense Clifford L. Stanley.

Stanley's memo was released September 30, only ten days after the repeal of the Clinton-era Don't Ask/Don't Tell policy. Stanley also said a chaplain is not required to lead or take part in such ceremonies "if doing so would be in variance with the tenets of his or her religion or personal beliefs."

In a separate but related memo, Jeh Johnson, the Department of Defense's general counsel, said the use of military facilities for private functions, "including religious and other ceremonies," should occur on a "sexual-orientation neutral basis."

Tony Perkins, president of the conservative Family Research Council, decried the memos as "outrageous" and said "the Defense Department is already pushing the military further down the slippery slope."

Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, said the memos raise questions about how the repeal of Don't Ask/Don't Tell will be implemented.

"What happens when the sort-of married couple is reassigned to a state where same-sex unions are prohibited by law?" queried Donnelly, whose organization led the charge in trying to preserve the ban on gays serving openly in the military.

Freedom to Marry, an organization that supports same-sex marriage, hailed the DOD announcements, even though some gay rights groups have some of the same questions about the future after Don't Ask/Don't Tell.

"Discrimination has no place in the military, or in marriage—and of course

people, gay or nongay, should be able to celebrate their love and commitment in ceremonies without interference by the government," said Evan Wolfson, the group's founder and president.

Lt. Col. Carleton Birch, a spokesman for the army chief of chaplains, said Friday that only one chaplain has left the army in protest of the repeal of Don't Ask/Don't Tell. In both memos, DOD officials noted that the private activities do not "constitute an endorsement" by the Pentagon. —Adelle M. Banks, RNS

Mormon leaders probe members' reading habits

Mormon leaders are surveying members about their readership of key websites and Mormon writers, a move that reflects the faith's growing interest in managing its public image as two Mormon candidates compete for the Republican presidential nomination.

Church officials confirmed that the survey on a range of social, political and doctrinal matters—including the trustworthiness of specific journalists—is partly intended to gauge how and where Mormons get their information.

"This kind of survey is one way church leaders have to hear from members," said church spokesman Scott Trotter, though he declined to say exactly what would be done with the results.

The confidential online poll, sent to at least 1,000 Mormons, asks about access to the church's weekly television and radio broadcasts and the frequency and purpose of visits to Mormon-oriented websites. The survey also seeks members' reasons for using various media outlets and asks if they find seven specific journalists and bloggers "trustworthy, consistent with church positions and teachings, enjoyable, candid and honest [or] thoughtful."

The list of writers includes, among others, conservative radio host Glenn Beck; popular LDS bloggers Joanna Brooks of Religion Dispatches and Jana Riess of Beliefnet; and religion reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack of the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

"Are they trolling for favorites or

people to avoid?" asked Al Tompkins, who teaches journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute, a St. Petersburg, Florida-based school for journalists. "It's their right to do both of those, but if I were a member, I would wonder why they are spending resources and energy on it." —Tony Semerad, *Salt Lake Tribune*

Chief rabbis condemn attack on Israeli mosque

Israel's chief rabbis are among the Jews in Israel and abroad who have strongly condemned an arson attack on a mosque in northern Israel. The rabbis made a solidarity visit to the Israeli Arab village of Tuba-Zangariyye, near Galilee, on October 3, soon after vandals torched the mosque.

The U.S. State Department condemned the arsonists' "hateful sectarian actions," calling them "dangerous and provocative." The arson is believed to be the work of Jewish extremists, although no one has been arrested.

Tensions between Jews and Arabs have escalated in recent weeks as Palestinian leaders appealed to the United Nations for recognition of an independent Palestinian state.

Israeli extremists torched a couple of mosques in the West Bank; a fatal car crash that killed a settler and his infant son is being blamed on stone-throwing Palestinians. The names of the accident victims were scrawled on the burned mosque.

Accompanied by Israeli President Shimon Peres and Muslim and Druze leaders, chief rabbis Shlomo Amar and Yona Metzger used unusually strong language to denounce the arson. "We must cry out against this deed, it is a desecration of God," Amar said. "All leaders should speak against this act of terror and hate."

In the U.S., the Anti-Defamation League expressed "shock" and "outrage" at the arson and said there have already been too many "wake-up calls" about "the violence and hatred among fringe groups of Israeli Jewish extremists." Israelis, the ADL said, must make it clear that violence "is never acceptable" and must "continue to reinforce this core value of Israeli society." —RNS

People

■ **Scott Anderson**, 56, who resigned as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) 21 years ago because a couple in his congregation threatened to reveal his life as a gay man, on October 8 was welcomed back to the ministry in Madison, Wisconsin. He was the first openly gay minister to be ordained since the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) dropped its prohibitions in May. Anderson's pastoral skills had not gone to waste in the intervening years; he was the director of the California Council of Churches and later took a similar post in Wisconsin. Anderson was also a member of a PCUSA theological task force that a few years ago concluded that bars should be

lifted for gays and lesbians who otherwise qualified for ordination.

■ Marking the 50th anniversary of the first broadcast of his Christian Broadcasting Network, **Pat Robertson** said he will no longer make political endorsements. "When I was in charge of the Christian Coalition I was available to mobilize grassroots support for somebody," Robertson told the Associated Press. "I don't have any army right now." Robertson's network produces programming in dozens of languages across about 200 countries. Robertson ran briefly for the GOP nomination for president in 1988 and later channeled his supporters into the Christian Coalition. Robertson has been criticized for voicing controversial opinions on CBN, most recently for sug-

gesting that a man whose wife has Alzheimer's could get divorced to marry another woman. He later said he was "misunderstood" and thinks spouses should support each other during illnesses.

■ Thousands of mourners in New Orleans paid final respects October 6 to Catholic Archbishop **Philip M. Hannan** as his casket was lowered beneath the sanctuary of St. Louis Cathedral to rest near eight predecessors. Hannan, 98, died September 29, 46 years to the day after his appointment to New Orleans, which he permanently embraced as his adopted city. Hannan gave the eulogies for John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis at their funerals. He became a friend of the Kennedy family when he was a bishop in Washington, D.C., before he moved to New Orleans. At the end of the funeral mass, an honor guard of paratroopers from Hannan's old World War II outfit, the 82nd Airborne, paid its tribute, and a trumpeter blew taps for the former chaplain, who ministered to GIs in the Belgian snow during the Battle of the Bulge.

■ German-born Lutheran bishop **Helmut Frenz**, known for his courageous opposition to the notorious military regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile in the mid-1970s, died September 13 in Hamburg, Germany, at the age of 78. Frenz was called to serve the Lutheran Church in Chile in 1965 and was elected bishop in 1970. After the September 11, 1973, military coup led by Pinochet, Frenz helped organize protests with other Protestant and Catholic leaders against the dictator, drawing attention to torture, unexplained disappearances and other human rights violations. While visiting Lutheran World Federation offices in Geneva, the bishop received word that the military regime would not allow him to reenter Chile. He served nine years as general secretary of the German section of Amnesty International. Frenz lived to see the restoration of democracy in Chile. The Chilean parliament awarded him its Medal of Honor in 2001, and in 2007, President Michelle Bachelet signed a law that made Frenz an honorary citizen of Chile.

Egypt rocked by sectarian violence in new regime

AS EGYPT approaches the anniversary of the protest movement that overthrew former president Hosni Mubarak, the country still finds itself torn by sectarian violence. On October 9, a demonstration in Cairo protesting an attack against a Coptic church in the Aswan province erupted into the worst violence since Mubarak's ouster in February. Two dozen people were killed and more than 200 wounded.

Coptic Christians, who constitute about 10 percent of Egypt's 80 million people, blamed the church attack on Muslim radicals. According to media reports, Egyptian troops, which accused the Cairo protesters of shooting at them, shot rubber bullets and tear gas into a crowd of thousands.

Demonstrators denied the charges and said the protest was a peaceful one, though some news reports said "thugs" bent on violence had fired at the soldiers.

Addressing the nation October 10 on state television, Egyptian prime minister Essam Sharaf said the clashes

between army forces and Coptic Christian protesters had brought the country back to the kind of violence seen at the onset of the revolution. "Instead of going forward, we found ourselves scrambling for security," said Sharaf.

Despite scenes of unity during the revolution, when Muslims joined Christians in protests against continuing sectarian violence and Christians were seen protecting Muslims during their prayers at Tahrir Square, attacks against Christian targets have continued. Prior to the recent attack, some 24 people had been killed, 200 injured and three churches attacked during the first five months of the post-Mubarak regime.

Christians say they fear the growing power of conservative Islamic groups. The second article of the Egyptian constitution declares Shari'a, or Islamic religious law, as the law of Egypt, leaving Christians fearful of their future place in the country if that provision is enforced. —ENInews

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, November 6
Matthew 25:1-13

GOD GRANTS astonishing freedom to creatures who bear the *imago dei*. The Arab Spring is only the latest evidence of the human desire for freedom. What's more, and far more awkward in a culture of autonomous freedom like ours, is that the God who gives us freedom also holds us accountable for what we do with this gift.

I love being free. I especially love autonomous freedom—the delight of pursuing and doing what I want. As a person of privilege, I can use this freedom to bless or to curse. At times I use it for something that gives life, but at other times I use it for something that diminishes or even squanders life. I can make decisions that waste the hours others need just to find and carry water to their families. If I'm out for a walk, my discretionary income allows me to buy a latte or a shirt just because I want one; my family will still eat and have shelter. As a pastor, I may use leadership to get my way just because I am trusted and given freedom of expression.

The problem is that autonomous freedom is near the root of what the Bible calls sin: life autonomous from God, autonomous from others. Remarkably, even though God knows our human instinct for turning the honor of interdependent freedom into the indulgence of autonomous freedom, God does not withdraw our freedom. Instead, God simply holds us accountable.

This tension is central to Matthew's parable. Freedom is implicit in this equal-opportunity parable: ten bridesmaids with ten lamps await the bridegroom. Since many of Jesus' parables involve premises of inequality, this equality parable stands out. Though all ten maidens stand in the same place with the same possibilities, their stories diverge dramatically. Their choices bring consequences.

Five of the maidens were wise and five were fools—this is measured by one criterion: action. It's what they did with their freedom and how they enacted their responsibility that matters. While we are not told why some had oil and some did not, their different choices reveal wisdom and foolishness.

When they heard news of the groom's impending arrival, all of the bridesmaids arose and began to trim their lamps. But only five bridesmaids had brought oil. When the five bridesmaids with no oil asked the other five women if they could borrow some, they were told to go and get the oil themselves. Though it was midnight, the maids went out to find the oil they needed.

This meant that at the moment that really mattered, the foolish maids did not have their minds on the bridegroom but

on the oil. This mattered. We may hate this piece of the story, but it's true. The five wise maids went with the groom into the wedding while the other five were shut out because of their foolishness. We may find ourselves sputtering about good intentions, about the five foolish women just being human, about demands of grace. But Jesus ends the story by saying that those shut out were not victims of an officious wedding guardian; it was the groom himself who declared that he did "not know them."

Though all the maids were equally free as they waited, they did not all use their freedom in the same ways. They all had the same opportunity to be in the right place, with the right intention, at the right time, but the readiness was up to them.

We may feel the need to rush in and soften this text, to surround it with wider New Testament themes and to offer assurance that this can't be the final word. This is a legitimate and urgent response. But if we let this text make its point, the parable presses us to search and measure our intentions. Are we preparing for the kingdom? We can choose autonomous freedom, understanding that ultimately there is a severe price, or we can choose to invest our freedom by preparing light to shine when and where it will be needed.

I've married many young men and women who could tell me—even before their wedding day—how their future spouse might abuse freedom and end their marriage. I recently sat with a man who tearfully explained that he'd felt justified in pursuing what mattered to him even as he ignored what mattered to his wife and daughter. "It was a very big mistake," he said in tears. "I was absorbed. I was blind. I lost them." The price can be worse than we imagine. I have seen churches exercise their freedom, get lost in themselves and forget their neighbors. When they belatedly reach out, those around them reply, "Too little, too late." It's the pain of wasted freedom.

The foolish maids failed to have what was essential. In Jesus' teaching, waiting or being ready never seems to be about chronological speculation or theological musings but about how we choose to live. The wise maids chose to act on what they could influence (whether or not they had oil) rather than worry about what they could not determine (the groom's arrival) or presume on others by borrowing.

We begin the story thinking that the mystery is the timing of the bridegroom's arrival, but as the parable unfolds, the central mystery instead is why some maids didn't bring oil. They failed to use their freedom wisely.

What is our freedom for? It's meant to show our readiness in action: to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the essence of lamp-ready lives.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, November 13

Matthew 25:14–30

BEING A PASTOR for 30 years has given me the chance to see both the gifts and the weaknesses of people up close. This vantage point sometimes makes mine one of the weirdest vocations as well as a rewarding one. My breath has been taken away by joy and by shame. It's the story of talents and tyrants told again and again.

The classic interpretation of Matthew's parable focuses on the importance of investing our talents (a word that in fact comes into English usage as a consequence of this parable). Read this way, the point of the story is the importance of growing the talents or gifts the master entrusts to us. Our response may involve risk, but fruitfulness is the goal. In this interpretation, the one-talent steward demonstrates a failure of faith as well as a failure of fruit-bearing. He is the fool and the rest are wise.

We focus on the accountability of the one who squanders what he was to have used and multiplied. Jesus regularly rebukes the wealthy and especially the religiously privileged for this. Fear and self-interested righteousness can lead one to bury the gift.

The inspiring part of the parable came earlier: the entrusting of talents, the multiplication of those resources and the granting of blessings. That's how many of us read this parable: as a call to flourishing and blessing. What's not to like? It's what our abundant-life hopes are all about. The interpretation hooks us. Work hard, invest your talents, yield a 100 percent return and get the blessing! It's a portrait of proverbial wisdom writ large and pain free.

But if you opt out by taking the talent and burying it, if you live in fear and self-protection, you'll lose big. You'll lose not only the growth of the talents but also the blessing of appreciation. This loss is far greater than the potential failure of risking the talent. Take the risk! You will gain your life by laying it down, giving it away.

One of the great joys of being a pastor is in being a cheerleader for faithful risk. It's a privilege to encourage people on the basis of this and other texts. God has given you gifts, I tell people. Invest them with freedom and hope.

In dramatic contrast, a second interpretation of this parable leads me to think more about tyrants than talents. Here the emphasis falls on the master. His illegal gain is named for what it is, and his harsh, demanding greed is exposed by the only one who refuses to be co-opted. In this reading, the mas-

ter and his hyperproductive minions are the fools, while the one-talent steward who pays the price for whistle-blowing is the wise one.

This reading asks whose voices matter in a world rife with power abuse. If we focus on the accountability of the master, we see him exposed in his corruption even though he has been powerful and successful. At the same time, the bold words of the one-talent steward result in a public accountability that's not specified within the parable but implied by the teaching of Jesus.

Here, living faithfully means naming the reality of abusive power or standing with one who is not cowering but bold and ready to suffer the consequences of being bold. This is the ministry of standing by. As a pastor, I encourage others to stand by: to be bold or steadfast in family interventions, in board confrontations, in complicated friendships, in personnel dynamics, in workplace politics and in public debates.

Both readings emphasize accountability; both readings are about squandering talent because of a tyrant. In one case the tyrant is the steward's fear. Burying even one talent squanders opportunity, allowing the tyranny of fear to trump all else. In

The kingdom that comes near us in Jesus directs us to a life abundant.

the other reading, a master who abuses power squanders the potential and freedom of the steward.

In our trust that Jesus is Lord, we find strength to confront tyrants without being a tyrant or falling prey to one. We are invited to a full and fruit-bearing life that is open, expansive and hopeful. This is the vision of human flourishing that neither the fearful steward nor the dominating master experience.

The multivalent approach to this text reminds me that pastoral ministry is a multivalent approach to life. I need help with life's both/and as much or more than I've needed help with either/or. The classic reading may be stronger, but each reading serves a need in the complex world of talents. Temptations and distractions exist on every side for different reasons. The kingdom of rightly ordered power that comes near us in Jesus sets us free from tyranny and directs us to life abundant. That good news may unbury our talent or give us our voice—either way it is a witness to a God who gives good gifts.

The author is Mark Labberton, who is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and directs its Ogilvie Institute of Preaching.

Still dying badly

by Allen Verhey

SOMETIME AROUND 1965 people became aware that the experience of dying in America was often made worse by medical experts. People began to complain that dying had been “medicalized,” that it had been made a medical rather than a human event, that too often people died lingering deaths, alone in a hospital, surrounded by technological apparatus and the experts who knew how to use it rather than by family and friends who knew *them*.

But then, as at least one story goes—a story frequently told in the literature on bioethics—in 1976 Karen Quinlan’s parents won their legal battle for the right to remove the respirator that was keeping Karen alive with no prospect of recovery. Subsequent court cases reinforced this right to refuse treatment. Those victories prompted reform of end-of-life care as patients wrested control over their dying away from doctors. Court decisions and subsequent public policy authorized advance directives in order to give decision making back to the patients or their representatives and honored refusals of treatment. By the last decade of the 20th century the needed reform had been accomplished, signaled by the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling concerning Nancy Cruzan—which reaffirmed the right to refuse life-sustaining treatment, including artificial nutrition and hydration—and also by the national Patient Self-Determination Act. Now people were able to die well.

There is some truth to that story about death and dying in America, but not enough to allow us to be satisfied with it. It is true that the courts and public policy have underscored the rights of patients to refuse life-sustaining treatments and have allocated decision-making power decisively to patients and their delegated agents. But one may ask whether this emphasis on autonomy and control has really remedied medicalized dying or helped people to die well.

There are reasons to be suspicious of the now-familiar story. Accounts abound of people who did not die well in spite of the acknowledgment of the rights of patients. In addition to such anecdotal evidence, a careful study was issued in the 1990s called “The Study to Understand Prognoses and Preferences for Outcomes and Risks of Treatments” (SUPPORT). It found that aggressive medical treatments to preserve life were still being used even when the treatments were futile and even when the patients or families did not want them. The study showed, moreover, that many patients had suffered with unrelied pain on their way to their deaths.

One response to SUPPORT was simply to urge ethicists to work harder to promote autonomous decisions, to get people to stipulate advance directives and to assert their rights. But a better response would have been to acknowledge the weaknesses of this emphasis on rights and autonomy as a remedy for medicalized death.

The fundamental weakness of the stress on autonomy is its minimalism. First, by attending to the procedural question about who should make end-of-life decisions, it allows us to ignore the substantive moral questions about what should be decided and about the virtues that should characterize the one

It is patients, not only doctors, who insist on doing “everything possible.”

who decides. Indeed, the minimalist approach can deliberately adopt a kind of agnosticism about what should be decided, treating a decision as right simply because it is freely made.

Second, the minimalism of the stress on autonomy is displayed in its negativism. The emphasis falls on not interfering with another’s liberty rather than on meeting another’s needs and on what we should not do to people rather than on what we should do for them. Moreover, its minimalism is manifest in the reduction of relationships of covenant to contracts between independent individuals.

It is little wonder, then, that this emphasis on rights and autonomy has not been altogether successful against the medicalization of death. It has provided an effective constraint against the physician who would run roughshod over a patient’s rights, but it has not provided and cannot provide any vision of an alternative to a medicalized dying. Moreover, this emphasis on independence and control of one’s own life and body displays to all who face death just how much our society despises the weakness and withering, the dependence and lack of control, that frequently accompany death. It makes us loath

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to die and loath to face our own dying. It is no longer always the doctors who insist on doing “everything possible” to resist death; it is now frequently the patients or their agents. The emphasis on the autonomy of patients could not nurture trust in a physician who had learned by experience some wisdom about life and morality. Instead, it has left patients to their own resources and all too frequently exposed the poverty of those resources, as well as the reluctance of many to consider their condition honestly or to have any conversation about their own dying.

But perhaps that reluctance is simply part of our culture’s “denial of death.” Perhaps we simply need to work harder not only to persuade people to formulate advance directives but also to end the silence that surrounds death. Perhaps we need to see death as “natural.” Such was the hope of the death awareness movement.

The death awareness movement challenged the medicalization of death and insisted that death cannot be avoided. The movement is associated with figures such as Herman Feifel and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. When Feifel wanted to interview moribund patients about their dying, hospital authorities were incensed. They regarded his project “cruel” and “sadistic.” And when Kübler-Ross asked permission to interview dying patients, the response of the hospital authorities was, “Dying? But no one is dying here!” It was precisely such resistance to the acknowledgment of death and to conversation about death that the death awareness movement set out to overcome.

To some extent the movement has succeeded. Still, its success has been limited—so limited that it must still inveigh against silence and denial. Though images of death are rife on our television sets, many people remain reluctant to discuss their own death.

That reluctance might prompt not just a continuing lament

A focus on patient autonomy leaves people to their own—often scarce—resources.

about silence and denial but also a consideration of the weaknesses of the movement and especially of its mantra that “death is natural.” One weakness of the mantra is simply that *natural* is such a slippery word. It means different things to different people in different contexts. Sometimes “death is natural” seems to mean nothing more than that death is inevitable. At the end of life, people die. What could be more “natural” than that? Death is simply “a part of life,” to use another mantra of the death awareness movement. Death is, on this reading of the slogan, merely a biological event that is predictably and universally the end of any organism’s life.

It is hard to disagree with that point, but it has little if any power against the denial of death or against its medicalization. People are unlikely to deny that death is universal, but they remain reticent to acknowledge their own death. It is not



death-in-general that we have trouble comprehending and facing but death as self-involving (and self-destroying).

Leo Tolstoy made the same point long ago in his novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Ivan Ilyich could grasp the syllogism that he had learned in logic class, “Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal,” but it “had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself.” Ivan resists acknowledging that he is dying. “It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible.” Tolstoy’s story is surely a favorite of the death awareness movement for its depiction of the silence and denial surrounding death, but the movement’s mantra, at least this particular reading of it, would have had little if any power against Ivan’s denial of death.

Moreover, if what the mantra means is that death is merely a biological event, then it would seem akin to the reduction of death to a medical event that the death awareness movement rightly finds objectionable. The death of a person is always something more than either a medical or a biological event. Indeed, the death awareness movement has insisted on that point. The mantra must, therefore, mean something more and other than that death is predictably and universally the end of any organism’s life. But what?

Fairly early in the movement, “death is natural” was taken to mean not simply that death is a biological event but that its meaning could be found in the natural process of growth. In 1975 Kübler-Ross edited a book titled *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*. An organic metaphor is invoked to make some sense of the “death is natural” mantra. Death is said to be natural because it is, or can be, growth. Frankly, I do not find much sense in this metaphor; the claim is so counterintuitive. Death

is not growth; it is the end of growing. The proper organic metaphor would seem to be that death is decay rather than growth. Death is not a part of life but the end of life, the absence of life.

It does make some sense, of course, to say that dying is a part of life and that dying can be a time of growth. But even if we take the “death is natural” theme as a way to invoke the biological metaphor to characterize dying as a time for growth, the growth metaphor in this context still seems to rely on the model of self-realization to be found in so much popular psychology. In this model, growth is not just a biological process; it is a moral ideal. Human beings should grow, should realize their biological and personal potential.

Another problem relates to the fact that every person has a wide variety of potentialities. We cannot realize them all. We need to make decisions about which to attempt to realize and which to downplay. It is clear, for example, that we have the potential to die, sometimes perhaps even an urge to die. But is that a potential we should make actual? The death awareness movement says no such thing, of course, but not because that would be inconsistent with the language of the realization of potential. Human potentialities and the possibilities of actualizing them are not an answer to our moral questions; they are among the reasons we ask moral questions.

Against medicalization, the language of growth is used to

assert that one should be allowed to die one’s own death. But if such language simply reasserts the emphasis on choice and autonomy so important to standard bioethics, then all the problems identified above are revisited.

Sometimes the “death is natural” mantra is a way of setting death in the context of the ecology of nature, of construing it as part of a natural rhythm of birth and death—the natural progression from spring to winter and back again. In this view, death is not just a biological event but a biological event that is part of a larger whole, part of a harmonious ecology. Little wonder, then, that the death awareness literature and many of the memoirs influenced by it often invoke images from nature as a way of coping with death. Streams rush to disappear in the lake. Birds return to the wetlands. Habitat is restored by decay. Eagles fly. And people find some transcendence over death by participation in this vast and glorious nature.

Evidently people do find some comfort and consolation in nature. But we should not exaggerate the power of the natural rhythm of birth and death, the natural progress from spring to winter and back again, to overcome resistance to the consideration of one’s own death. Death remains an autobiographical event, a self-involving event, a self-destroying event. Winter leads back to spring, back to life, to be sure, but the death of a person does not lead back to the life of *that* person.



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Bexley Hall Seminary and Seabury Western Theological Seminary, two theological schools of the Episcopal Church, are jointly seeking a person to serve as president of both institutions. The committee welcomes both applications and the suggestion of names. It seeks suggestions of and applications from women, minority persons, and persons with experience in church leadership and academic theology, as well as those with non-traditional backgrounds.

Names and applications should be sent to the committee by November 11 at bexley.seabury.search@gmail.com. Complete materials are available at www.seabury.edu and www.bexley.edu.

That person is simply dead, that story is over. Ivan Ilyich's line, "It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible," still echoes from the horizon of both the sunrise and sunset of the days of our dying. And the hole in a life left by the death of a loved one is not filled by the larger whole of nature.

One problem with the "death is natural" mantra is its denial not of death but of the wrongness of death. The sense of the wrongness of death is hard to repress. And neither the conscious repetition of the mantra nor any feigned indifference has finally much power against medicalized death. The promise of the death awareness movement—that if we just learned to regard death as natural, we could avoid a medicalized death—is unfulfilled.

Both standard bioethics and the death awareness movement give truncated accounts of the problems with medicalized death. The problems involve not just the violation of patient control or simply silence and denial but the vision of death as the great enemy to be defeated by the greater power of medicine. To be sure, death is a great enemy. It threatens to cause alienation from our bodies, separation from our communities and the eclipse of God. The ironic result of a medicalized death is that death makes good on those threats before the end of our lives by the very way death is resisted. We are not fated to have a medicalized dying, but it has a strong hold on us precisely because we recognize that life is a great good, that the threats of death are real and terrible and that medicine is a good gift of God the creator and redeemer.

Resistance to medicalized death need not deny the sadness of death, but it may require something like the Christian conviction that though death is a great enemy, it is an enemy already defeated by the God who raised Jesus from the dead and will raise us up by the same great power (Eph. 1:19). In the strength of that conviction Christians should and sometimes do both recognize the threats of death and meet those threats with attention to the dying person as an embodied, communal and spiritual being.

That recognition and a commitment to such attention gave birth to a third challenge to medicalized death, a challenge that had its roots in the deep Christian faith of Cicely Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement. It was her vision of a home for the dying that led to the establishment in 1967 of St. Christopher's Hospice in London. Saunders was herself a physician, and her vision was a challenge not to medicine itself but to the narrowing of its ministry to the effort to cure. Her vision incorporated medicine and its authority, joining it to care for the

dying. She insisted that research-based medical treatment for pain relief should accompany attention to the psychological, social and spiritual needs of dying patients.

However innovative her challenge to medicalization, Saunders regarded her vision as solidly within the Christian tradition of care for the sick. As she said, "For a thousand years, Christian charitable institutions carried the burden of the sick and the poor—the indigent, orphans and others—amounting almost to a general national health and welfare service."

The key concept in hospice was not the rights of patients but the care of patients. To be sure, the dignity of each patient was explicitly recognized (and proselytizing was forbidden). But the relationship to patients was not seen as a contract between self-interested individuals but as a covenant and a community. And the mantra, if there was one, was not "death is natural" but Matthew 25:40: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these . . . you did it to me."

Saunders's vision was carried to the United States soon after St. Christopher's was established. Less than a decade later, in 1975, a hospice modeled on St. Christopher's opened in Connecticut. And across the country volunteers, nurses and doctors who shared something of Saunders's vision initiated programs to care for dying persons in their homes.

In 1982 Congress passed the Medicare Hospice Benefit, which provided payment for hospice services to patients older than 65 who had a prognosis of less than six months to live and

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who agreed to forgo therapies intended to provide a cure for their disease. Patients were entitled to the care and support of a hospice team, supervised by a physician, who would attempt to relieve pain, manage symptoms and alleviate psychological, social and spiritual stress. Gradually private insurance programs and Medicaid began to include some coverage for hospice. By 2004 there were more than 3,200 hospice programs in the U.S., caring for more than 900,000 people.

The story of hospice is quite remarkable and is replete with successes. Hospice is much to be commended as institutional support for dying well. But there are problems even with hos-

The “death is natural” mantra pretends that death is not an enemy.

pice. In the first place, it remains an underutilized resource. Many physicians and others remain unwilling or unable to tell patients that they are dying, and many patients remain unwilling or unable to hear the prognosis that could lead to their utilization of hospice. Silence and denial are still realities, as is medicalized death.

The underutilization prompted by silence and denial is, however, not the only problem. Ironically, there is a risk of medicalization in the hospice movement itself—not the medicalization of death, but the medicalization of suffering. The success of palliative medicine has led to great advances in pain management and to the risk of reducing suffering to pain and reducing care for the dying to the management of their pain. Dying without pain is desirable, of course, and effective pain relief makes an important contribution to the possibilities of dying well, but dying well and faithfully cannot and should not be reduced to a death without pain.

Saunders had insisted that hospice care utilize the best practices of pain relief and symptom management, but she also insisted on a relationship with the suffering and dying that was not simply a relation of professional and client but one of the kind that Martin Buber described as an I-Thou relationship, a genuine meeting of two persons in a covenantal way. She had envisioned a “home”—a building, to be sure, but also a place of warmth and welcome, a place to get comfortable with family and friends, a place to be yourself. Compassion required access to the best palliative care possible, but it also required that others just be there with and for the suffering person. Keeping company was no less a component of care, no less a key to dying well, than pain management.

Unfortunately, a generic spirituality has replaced Saunders’s commitment to the Christian faith. Some, of course, regard this not as a problem but as an advance, as a necessary adjustment to the religious pluralism of American society (and perhaps as a requirement of government funding). Religious differences are a significant issue for hospice. To its credit, hospice did not deliberately adopt a perspective that set aside a person’s faith

(or religious beliefs or spirituality) in favor of scientific objectivity. It recognized that in dying as in living, we are surrounded not only by puzzles but also by mystery. And at the depths and heights of our lives and at the ends of them, there is the Ultimate Mystery, which many call God. There is no escaping this mystery.

Of course, the world is full not only of mystery but also of different ways of naming it. But name it we must if we are to begin to interpret its presence and to relate it to senses of dependence, gratitude, remorse, hope and responsibility. One way or another we learn to name the Mystery, and the way we live and die is a response to the Mystery so named. There is no purely rational foundation for talking about the Mystery any more than there are purely rational ways for talking about morality. There is no religious Esperanto any more than there is a moral Esperanto, no universal language for talking about either the Mystery or morality. That's the first problem with the sort of generic spirituality adopted by hospice.

Hospice has adopted a generic spirituality that refuses to name the Mystery because it seeks to respect religious and spiritual diversity. But generic spirituality can have an ironic result; it is not finally hospitable to difference. When spirituality is reduced to a lowest common denominator, to something like "the Ultimate Mystery," then the ways in which it is named can be trivialized. Or worse, spirituality can be reduced to an internal and individual search for meaning. Then particular religious communities and their practices can be regarded as less relevant to the dying than this individual quest for meaning.

I am a Christian. I know of no other way to talk faithfully about the Mystery at the heart of our world than as a Christian. Of course, it is easy to be presumptuous here, easy to claim to know too much. Even so, as a Christian, I dare to claim that all our responses to Mystery are in fact responses to the God whose story is told in scripture.

One can do worse, I think, than to name the Mystery wrongly. One can respond to the Mystery—even if it is named rightly—by ignoring it. One can deny or suppress the senses evoked by it. Even those who can name the Mystery rightly can still be guilty of refusing to trust and to honor God. They can—and sometimes do—regard God as the enemy of God's own work. More often, they turn the Mystery into a giant puzzle. And more often still, they domesticate the Mystery, rendering the inscrutable not only scrutable but also serviceable to their own projects, to their own communal or individual causes. Those who know enough to say, "Lord, Lord" can still be guilty of domesticating God, drafting God into the service of this army or that one, into the service of this ecclesiastical organization or that one, or into their own service. But the Mystery resists—and a commandment prohibits—the effort to domesticate

God. The domestication of the Mystery is the second problem with the sort of generic spirituality adopted by hospice. It virtually sponsors the domestication of the Mystery, regarding it as therapeutic or as helpful, even if it is a helpful fiction. It is rendered another opiate.

Emphasizing the individual's internal quest for meaning and undercutting the role of particular religious communities, this generic spirituality is too easily co-opted by notions of individual autonomy advanced by the patient rights movement. But it can also be co-opted by the death awareness movement when the spirituality assumed by the mantra that "death is natural" is regarded as somehow transcending religious differences.

At the beginnings of hospice a list of its stakeholders would have included the Christian church. Now it is less than clear that the Christian church would be included. Nevertheless, the Christian community does have a stake in care for the dying. Saunders's vision should be enough to remind us of that. Hospice remains a movement in which many Christian doctors, nurses, social workers, chaplains and volunteers can and do fulfill their vocations. Many Christians die well and faithfully with the help of hospice. The Christian community's stake in the care of the dying may also suggest, however, both support for new hospice programs, self-consciously and deliberately formed in accord with Saunders's originating vision, and—more important—a refusal simply to surrender death and dying to medicine, or to abandon its proclamation that death has been and will be defeated by the great power of God, or to leave the task of ministry to the dying to hospice.

I grant that some progress has been made against the medicalization of death since the Quinlans had to fight to take their daughter off a respirator. But the challenges have not yet been joined to credible alternatives. It is easy, when dying goes badly, to blame the doctors, but it is not their responsibility to teach people how to die well and faithfully. That challenge belongs to the communities of faith. They have the resources and the traditions to re-form our vision of death, to teach people how to die well and faithfully and how to care well for the dying. It is time for the churches to rise to that challenge, to begin again to apprentice people in the art of dying well and faithfully.



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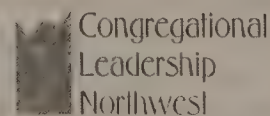
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Speaking to mourners

by Lucy Bregman

WHEN ELISABETH Kübler-Ross's *On Death and Dying* burst upon the world in 1968, hospital chaplains and those who trained pastoral counselors were among the first to endorse it. The psychological framing of death and dying with labels such as "denial" or "depression" was not a problem for pastoral counselors well accustomed to Carl Rogers.

Almost immediately after the publication of *On Death and Dying*, the pastoral care and counseling experts moved into the area of grief and loss. By the mid-1970s, works such as *Death and Ministry: Pastoral Care of the Dying and the Bereaved*, edited by Donald Bane, and *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation*, by Wayne Oates, showed how smoothly the basic framework of Kübler-Ross could be adopted by clergy.

Eventually, this perspective required a more sustained theological treatment, and the fine 1983 work by Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, tried to provide this. Mitchell and Anderson began from the recognition that loss and grief had not been Christian topics, had in fact been ignored or denied in favor of a focus on death. Yet for them, "death is only one form of loss," and so following the lead of the death awareness movement and earlier pastoral care appropriations, they center on loss, offering both psychological and theological perspectives.

Society does not encourage awareness of powerful loss feelings. . . . This is a Stoic position; it represents in our view one of the most powerful anti-Christian stances in our society. It is apathy or indifference which breeds a callous disregard for the sacredness of all life. Loss is inescapably painful precisely because attachment is a human necessity. . . . To be human is to be a griever for all kinds of losses.

To subsume death under loss in this way would have been unthinkable for Christians half a century earlier. Death was, and had always been, utterly special, absolute and ultimate; it was not "only one form" of anything!

Meanwhile, Mitchell and Anderson also looked anew at what space was given to grief at funerals. Alas, when it came to preaching a funeral sermon, they thought, pastors could find little or nothing that would truly help them address the experience of loss.

At the time, many preachers were influenced by the work of Swiss theologian Oscar Cullmann. Writing in the mid-1960s, Cullmann argued in direct opposition to an earlier generation

of pastors who, in the face of death, had consoled griever with notions of natural immortality. For Cullmann, such an approach to death was more Greek than Christian. Christians see death as the enemy, Cullmann insisted, and the only thing that defeats death is resurrection by God, a totally miraculous event.

The tone of funeral sermons influenced by Cullmann was relentlessly and abstractly upbeat. Unlike sermons on natural immortality, Cullmann's message of victory over death could not be bolstered or fleshed out by allegories of natural transitions, of sailing or returning home. Christian hopes were discontinuous with any natural views; God had reversed, not fulfilled, normal human responses.

While Cullmann himself wanted to restore a sense of death's intrinsic "horror," this element does not appear in funeral sermons that are obviously based on his ideas. Rather, Christian funerals became occasions for affirming Christ's conquest of death and the joyous shared certainty of resurrection. The proclamation of "victory" and "resurrection" became the norm. According to this theology, it was wrong to be sad at a Christian funeral.

This emphasis was surely a denial of the sadness felt by the mourners. Indeed, complaints about revised "resurrection-filled" funeral liturgies poured in to the church bodies that authorized them.

For Mitchell and Anderson, the Cullmannesque sermon about victory represented a new kind of denial of death. "The theological assertion is accurate, but from a pastoral perspective the theological priority has been misplaced."

By the time the death awareness movement percolated through chaplains and pastoral caregivers into the general sensibilities of the public (and this happened very rapidly), leaving space for grief, rather than denying it, seemed honest and necessary. So in a 1989 anthology of funeral sermons, one finds this example:

We have gathered as members of the Body of Christ . . . to share the heartache, the faith and the hope of the S_____ family. The pain of grief is always heavy; so our acts of friendship can help to shoulder their sorrows. In these

Lucy Bregman teaches at Temple University. This article is excerpted from *Preaching Death: The Transformation of Christian Funeral Sermons*, just published by Baylor University Press.

moments when they can feel bewildered, our faith bolsters theirs. And when the tragedy of it all clouds their way, our presence can brighten the horizons of their days. (*We Are the Lord's: An Anthology of Select Funeral Messages*)

Here the presence of other human beings serves as a sign of the continuing presence of God. What people in this situation need to hear is what Paul proclaimed in Romans 8:35–39: God will be with you in the midst of life and death. God will never abandon you, even when you are sure you are alone.

In other examples of anthologized sermons from this period, the pastor's own reactions and feelings model how important an honest expression of the full range of grieving should be:

My first reaction was one of anger when I heard the news. When the hospital called to tell me that _____ had died of a massive heart attack, it seemed so unfair to me that I couldn't even begin to think about what I would say until my own angry feelings had eased. (*A Time to Die*, by Kent Richmond)

The assumption here is that if Christians are forbidden to be sad at a funeral, the message will not offer a joyous hope but instead convey the sense that our real emotions do not matter one bit to God.

Rather than deny grief, funerals today are careful to make room for it.

Mitchell and Anderson's point has been heeded. Indeed, a more recent author noted how by the 1990s omission of the resurrection altogether had become one liturgical pattern. Pastoral care author Gene Fowler, in *Caring Through the Funeral*, warned against this move, but noted how it was justified by a sincere desire to curb avoidance and denial of the reality of death. Although he disapproved, the arguments for and against this approach reveal the triumph of pastoral over strictly theological approaches in the discussion.

There was still another, less direct reason why "victory over death" did not work well in the setting of the 1970s and later. The death awareness movement drew attention to the plight of terminally ill hospital patients whose basic condition was one of "acceptance." Yet patients were pressured to "keep fighting," and the military model of medicine was so pervasive that patients, doctors and everyone else had bought into it uncritically. It was assumed that doctors fight to win the war against death, and when the patient dies, that war is lost. Kübler-Ross and her cohorts in the death awareness movement insisted that this military "battle against death" was itself born of denial, and for patients the battle could be a disaster. They were not "giving up" or losing a war, said the death awareness move-

ment; they were truly "in a state of acceptance" and should not be forced to endure further treatments. Often the major reason for further interventions was not the betterment of the patient, who would die soon anyway, but to bolster the doctors' sense that *they* at least had "kept on fighting."

Although no one could reasonably blame Cullmann himself for advocating overtreatment of the dying, or any of the practices the death awareness movement condemned, it appeared that his heavy-handed vision of "death as enemy" made his ideas look just like what the new death awareness movement protested. Cullmann could bolster the idea that the authentic Christian response to death was to fight and postpone it, at all costs, in all contexts, without limit. It was this relentless battle against death as enemy that made dying in a high-tech hospital a worse human experience for patients than old-fashioned dying in one's home.

We may ask if this is indeed a valid conclusion to draw. Support for unlimited medical intervention is not found directly in sermons with the explicit theology of "victory over death." There is, most professionals and experts recognize, no absolute Christian mandate to extend the lives of the terminally ill by futile and uncomfortable treatments just because the defeat of death is what the gospel message is about. But ordinary Christians certainly have drawn this conclusion and insisted on medical interventions for a family member on this ground, even when informed by doctors that such treatments would do more harm than good. Many of my Christian students assume that their faith requires them to be so consistently "antideath" that no withdrawal from treatment should be allowed. The language they use is not that of formal



medical bioethics, Catholic or Protestant. It is streamlined Cullmann all the way.

By 1985, pastoral care author Robert Hughes's excellent handbook, *A Trumpet in Darkness: Preaching to Mourners*, could assume that "the mourners are the target of the [funeral] sermon." No longer treated as an assemblage of the future dead, the congregation is regarded as a community touched by grief, experiencing a natural and appropriate sorrow in response to loss. So an appropriate theological message must be given to comfort mourners. While not denying death, the sermon should not merely repeat the message of psychology. The text from Romans 8 was one answer, and it is now among the most popular sermon texts. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, even at a time when the weight of separations and loss dominates our immediate feelings. Nothing can separate us even when God does not appear as present or in control.

Note that in this passage, as it is now understood and used for sermons, there is no promise at all that nothing can separate us from the dead. The dead are gone, absent; the funeral does not promise eventual family reunions or any sense of immediate intuitive spiritual presence or nearness. Nor is there any reference at all to their or our future state; nothing can separate us even now, when we hurt. But the one to whom this refers is God alone, who is always present, even if hidden, in the midst of our sorrow.

The older message was that the deceased "is with Jesus," once again returned "home" or now set sail to encounter his or her

Pilot face to face; so where will we soon be? It is we, the future dead, who must be made aware that we will follow the deceased. Today, the focus is on death as the occasion for grief, opening up a gap or hole in this world that seems impossible to fill.

But when the focus of the funeral is on the mourners, and they are promised that God will never be lost or separated from them, there may still be a role for the deceased. It is true that the funeral is for the living, not the dead. After all, the funeral home deals with the body, say authors of contemporary manuals, while the minister focuses on the needs of the living (*not* on the "souls" of either). And yet, there is more. John S. Mansell, in *The Funeral: A Pastor's Guide*, says the pastor should ask himself, "Am I doing right by the departed?"

The funeral sermon is a time when the faith community weaves fitting words of faith around the life of the departed. During the funeral sermon, the life of the departed is remembered in ways that convey Christian caring and respect for the bereaved.

The purpose of the funeral is now defined by this strong sense that the living owe the dead person something, as a primary obligation of our role as mourners. Nor is this a debt only for those who are mourners in the psychological sense. Perhaps the pastor represents the entire Christian community, or all of society and humanity, in fulfilling this duty to the dead. A funeral that "does right by" the deceased will leave everyone with a sense of completion, if never happiness. The living owe the dead the honor, the recognition, that a good funeral provides.

It seems legitimate to wonder if this newer view is Christian. Its advocates, unlike earlier generations of manual authors and anthologists, are not worried by "pagan" remnants and influences in the Christian funeral. Their worries are about denial and about false and useless theologies that could make mourning worse. One of these false theologies is the belief that this particular death was directly "the Lord's will" in its manner and timing. The current view is that no preacher should include this idea in his sermon, and it is pastorally inappropriate to encourage it privately—unless it is clear that this is the only means by which the family can make peace and sense of the death.

Other theological messages to avoid, according to recent literature, include any focus on afterlife, heaven and the happiness of the dead, which now appears to cruelly disregard the real sorrow of the bereaved. Absolutely no more children playing in the streets of Jerusalem. For contemporary writers, the death of a child is automatically in the problem category for theological as well as pastoral reasons. Sermons with titles such as "My God, Why?" are a direct expression of this current atmosphere and understanding.

We come together at this time for various reasons . . . to pay tribute, to take time to remember Tina . . . to express our feelings to those who most deeply mourn . . . and we come to share our faith. . . . But if we are honest, we have to admit we have also come to this place to ask, "Why?" . . . But there are no easy answers to the question of why. We cannot give

Luke 24:36–42

He could not give up the flesh.
In the moments before we leave forever
we want to say what he did:
*I have hands, feet, bones; touch me,
and is there anything for breakfast?*

We are tethered to tubes,
nails hammered hard,
spear in our side, soon
to pass through, but still
this is my body,

with the scar on my hand from the bike accident,
the lungs shredded with chemo,
the broken left foot never quite healed,
but still all I have ever known:
this is my body.

If I rise, let it be not
as a ghost, no metaphor
for new life; please something
like this body, some flesh,
something I can understand.

Carol L. Gloor

the reason for this turn of events. We can only join the very human question of the moment, “My God, my God, Why?” (*We Are the Lord’s*)

The funeral that works, however, not only “does right by” the deceased but, it is argued, should be a “celebration of life” in his or her memory. This for many funeralgoers and pastors may be the best purpose of the funeral. While earlier authors wished to distinguish between “Christian” and “humanistic” funerals for the sake of eliminating pseudo-religious in-between ones, later guides intentionally avoid such a division, grounding all funerals, including Christian ones, in the work of celebrating the life. Someone, a human person, was here and is now gone. To this, the preacher must convey the presence of God in the midst of exactly this human sorrow.

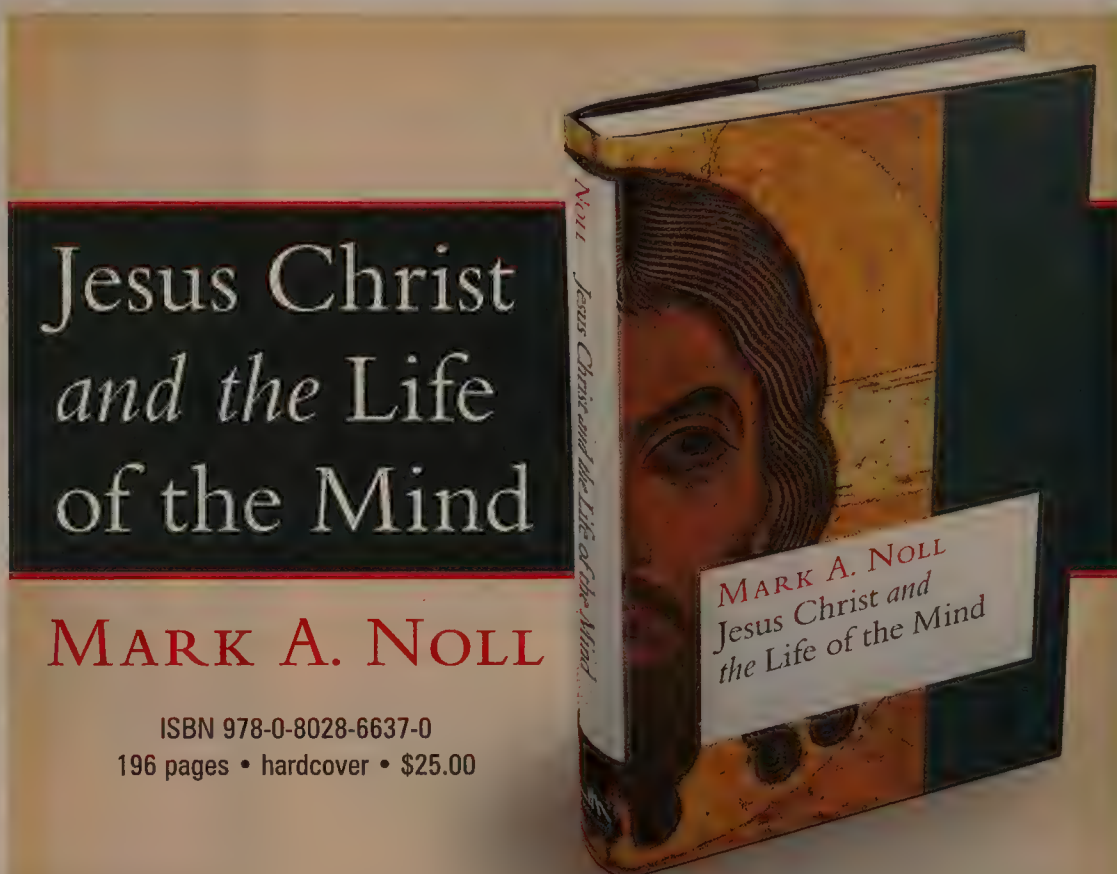
But it seems reasonable to ask what makes “celebration of the life of _____” a Christian goal, even when this is presided over by a pastor in a church setting. Perhaps it could be fulfilled better by the family and friends themselves, in an intimate memorial service. Perhaps it belongs in the funeral home, as a theme for the viewing, not at the funeral or burial.

I am not suggesting that such a “celebrating the life” statement of the funeral’s purpose is pagan or secular. These pastors, following Seward Hiltner’s lead from the mid-20th century, would criticize the restriction of Christian topics to those that looked explicitly “religious.” This would be a new version of compartmentalization. If the pastor can counsel a woman whose son is in trouble at home and at school, then surely the pastor can honor the life of a dead member of the congregation by celebrating this person as an individual. Christian faith is no longer to be defined by otherworldly goals, ideas, and images; it is a living relation to God through Jesus Christ here in the midst of life, and in the midst of sorrow when someone loved has died. For those who write and preach funeral sermons today, to “do right by” the deceased, to celebrate his or her life, is fully compatible with a sense of God’s presence and concern and love for all. It is compatible with a vision of God suffering along with us, rather than ordaining particular deaths at particular moments.

But if funerals that celebrate a life seem to fall short of an earlier era’s main ideals theologically, there is also

another perspective from which to evaluate these attempts to celebrate. This revisioned purpose and message for funerals may not really express what the death awareness movement had as its goal when it looked at the anguish and loneliness of dying hospital patients and grieving families. It is possible that the movement’s original agenda could have been expressed and appropriated in a manner that led Christian pastors and preachers in alternative directions. We need to ask how loss became celebration. And perhaps, just perhaps, loss is too narrow and too normal a category to mark off a death appropriately.

CC



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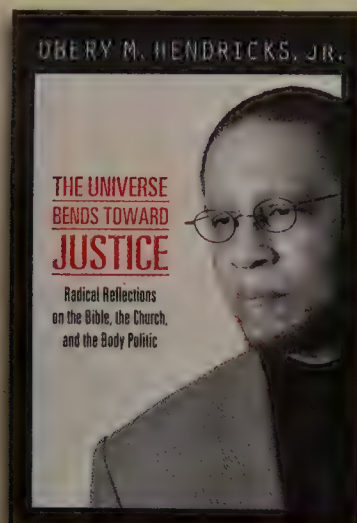
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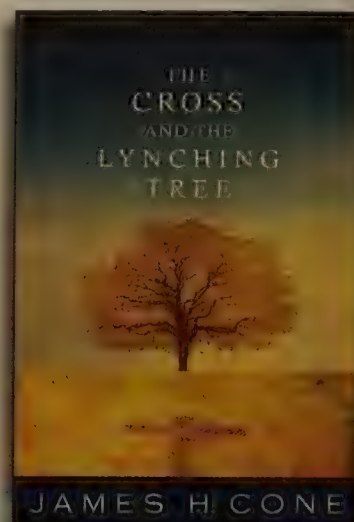
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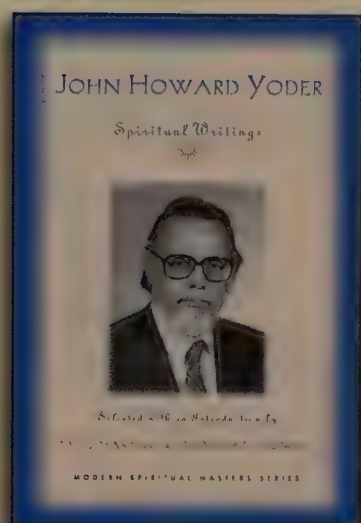
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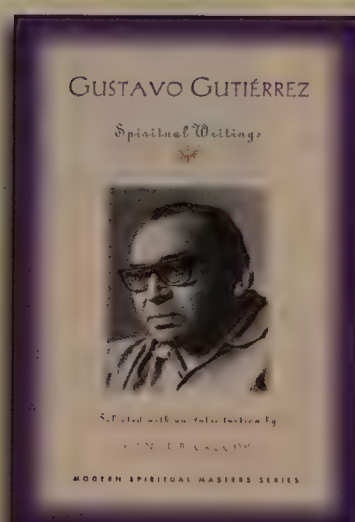
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by Thomas G. Long

Why do men stay away?

GATHERED AROUND the coffeepot in a church fellowship hall on a fall Sunday, a gaggle of men are talking with animation and passion, joking and bragging in the way of males. The topic? Football, of course. “How ’bout them Devils! D’ya see that pick six in the third quarter? Amazing! Hey, Joe, sorry about your Dawgs! Maybe you’ll get ’em next week, if they don’t fire your coach first!” In a few minutes, many will wander into worship, the married ones joining their wives. As the first hymn begins, some of them will stand and keep silent guard, staring mutely into space as the women beside them sing.

What is it with men and church? We men are famously outnumbered, to be sure. According to a recent survey, we make up only 39 percent of the worshipers in a typical congregation. This is not just because we die earlier and leave the pews filled with the sturdier gender. The percentages hold across the board, for every age category.

Even when we do show up for worship, we’re often not particularly happy about it. This is not breaking news, of course. Study after study has shown that many men who name themselves as Christian feel bored, alienated and disengaged from church. When we drag ourselves to church, researchers say, it is not for ourselves but to fulfill the obligations of our roles as son, husband, father or pastor.

Why are men and the church often at odds? Sadly, many of the answers are as insulting as they are misguided. Some researchers are persuaded that the antipathy of men to church resides at the hormonal level. They argue that men, loaded as they are with testosterone, have a proclivity to impulsive, risk-taking, occasionally violent action—exactly the behavior disallowed in the soft world of worship. Given this theory, what enticements can the wimpy church possibly offer us men when we compare it to the joys of hiding away in a man cave, stuffing our maws with pizza and beer as we watch *Da Bears* and heading out after sundown to rip off a few wheel covers and rumble in the Wal-Mart parking lot?

Others propose a more political and historical explanation, namely that centuries of male control of the church have yielded to an ineluctable force of feminization. Pastel worship, passive and sentimental images of the Christian life, handholding around the communion table and hymns that coo about lover-boy Jesus who “walks with me and talks with me” have replaced stronger, more masculine themes. One man reported that the first thing he does when he walks into a church is to look at the curtains. One glance tells him all he needs to know about who’s making the decisions.

Really? The feminine erosion of the church? As David

Foster Wallace said in a different context, this is an idea “so stupid it practically drools.” Even sillier are the proposed masculine remedies. One website suggests “Ten Ways to Man Up Your Church,” beginning with obtaining “a manly pastor” who projects “a healthy masculinity.” This patently ignores strong women clergy, of course, but it also denigrates the capacity of men to recognize and respond to able leadership regardless of gender or stereotypes. I recently visited a church with a chest-thumping manly pastor. After worship, one man in the congregation confided, “I feel like I’m on the set of a Tarzan movie.” As for “manning up” worship, I know that if my church begins handing out NASCAR jackets with the bulletins, I’m going to look for a different church—maybe one with lace curtains.

Still, the numbers don’t lie. Men are staying away from church. The reasons are undoubtedly complex, but perhaps a clue can be found in a Christian group that attracts men and women in roughly equal numbers: Eastern Orthodoxy. A cynic

Why are men and the church often at odds?

might say that men are attracted to Orthodoxy because it is conservative, with an all-male clergy, many of them sporting beards. The finding of religion journalist Frederica Mathewes-Green, however, is closer to the truth. She surveyed male adult converts and discovered that Orthodoxy’s main appeal is that it’s “challenging.” One convert said, “Orthodoxy is serious. It is difficult. It is demanding. It is about mercy, but it is also about overcoming myself.” Another said that he was sick of “bourgeois, feel-good American Christianity.”

Yes, some churchgoers are satisfied with feel-good Christianity, but I think many Christians—women and men—yearn for a more costly, demanding, life-changing discipleship. Perhaps women are more patient when they don’t find it, or more discerning of the deeper cross-bearing opportunities that lie beneath the candied surface. Men take a walk or hang around the church coffeepot talking in jargon about football: another disciplined and costly arena of life in which people sacrifice their bodies and their individual desires for a larger cause that matters to them, at least for the moment. Near transcendence is preferable to no transcendence at all.

*Thomas G. Long teaches at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and is the author of *Preaching from Memory to Hope*.*

IN Review

Knowledge through suffering

by Stanley Hauerwas

It takes a lifetime, as well as a remarkable life, to write a book like *Wandering in Darkness*. Eleonore Stump asks: Is it possible in the face of suffering to believe in a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly morally good? She relentlessly explores this inquiry not only by helping us to see that the question itself must be questioned, but by applying to the query her extraordinary erudition, a gift for philosophical and analytical clarity, and what must be hard-won and profound theological judgments.

This is not a book to give someone who is in the midst of problems that are making that person wonder if God is a good God. Rather, it is written for anyone who may think they would like to write a book for people who are in the midst of a crisis of faith occasioned by suffering. Stump is a well-trained analytical philosopher and is equally well schooled in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. She nicely exhibits adherence to the advice often given to those so trained: when confronted by what seems to be a difficulty that cannot be solved, make a distinction. These distinctions are never ends in themselves, but they help us to think more clearly about how suffering challenges our belief in God.

The heart of *Wandering in Darkness* is the telling of four stories of suffering from scripture: Job, Samson, Abraham and Mary of Bethany. Stump prepares readers for the significance of these stories by beginning her book with a careful and very interesting argument about why the knowledge we gain from narratives cannot be gained from the analytical philosopher's attempt to restrict what can be known to "knowledge of that." In a char-

acteristic imaginative move she distinguishes between narrative and analytical knowledge, suggesting that the latter knowledge is Dominican and the former is Franciscan.

According to Stump, the Dominicans, who were early forerunners of analytical philosophers, categorize knowledge by sets of abstract properties and designations. Much is gained by such analysis, but if knowledge is restricted to the categories loved by the Dominicans, we can fail to recognize the significance of narratives as crucial for understanding our lives. So we also need the kind of knowing represented by the Franciscans—that is, knowledge that is found in stories, typological knowledge that comes through our interaction with other human beings. Though Stump's Dominican talents are well on display in this book, they are in the service of her Franciscan heart, a heart that has its reasons.

In her instructive account of the kind of knowledge that is gained through narratives, Stump introduces a distinction between first-, second- and third-person perspectives that is crucial for the way she develops the stories of Job, Samson, Abraham and Mary. Second-person knowledge is fundamentally different from first-person knowledge of ourselves or third-person knowledge of another because second-person knowledge of another requires personal interaction of a direct and immediate sort. Accordingly, second-person knowledge is paradigmatically Franciscan, and stories are second-person accounts.

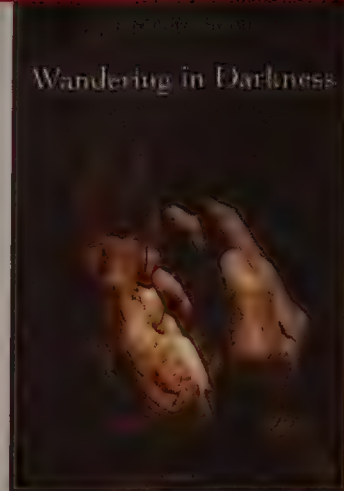
Stump's introduction of second-person knowledge makes necessary one other development before she begins her discussion of biblical stories. In part two

of the book she develops an account of love and loneliness that characterizes our second-person experiences. We are creatures created to desire the love of God and one another. Such love wants not only good for, but also union with, the beloved. Our very ability to be an integrated human person depends on our ability to be loved and to love. When we will evil in the name of good, we become divided against ourselves and suffer "a kind of willed loneliness" in which we are alienated from God and other creatures.

Stump then tells the biblical stories, each with its distinctive character, as stories fundamentally of the loss of love and its restoration through suffering. I have no doubt that her reading will be controversial. She contends that the suffering of each of these figures finally has purpose because it puts each in a more determinative relation to God. The way she tells these stories means that she must often argue against critical reconstruction of these texts in favor of the way they have been read in the past. For example, she reads the beginning and end of Job as integral to the poetry, arguing that God refuses to give up even on the possibility that the devil—that is, the one who is so fragmented he is incapable of love—might be saved.

In a like manner she suggests that

Stanley Hauerwas recently wrote *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir (Eerdmans)*.



Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering

By Eleonore Stump

Oxford University Press, 640 pp., \$99.00

Abraham rightly followed God's command to sacrifice Isaac because of his faith—his trust in the God who had promised that he would be the father of a people. Stump's reading of these stories does not deny that suffering is real. In particular, her reading of Hagar and Ishmael is profound. She knows that their suffering cannot be explained away, but she also refuses to let it be the last word. She argues that their suffering is not pointless when we read from a second-person perspective, in which nothing is more significant than the desire to be in love with God.

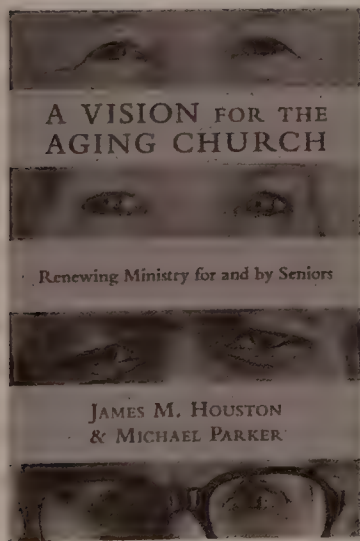
I confess that I was not predisposed to agree with Stump's exegesis (if that is the right word for her approach to these texts), but I found her retelling of the stories of Job, Sampson (whose suffering was deserved) and Abraham very persuasive. I did not find her argument that Mary of Bethany felt betrayed by Jesus' delay before coming to heal Lazarus nearly as convincing. But her account of

the shame that may have characterized Mary's life, that this Mary was a person others found to be defiled, is powerful whether it is true of her or not. In particular, Stump's suggestion that the love of Jesus glorifies such lives is not only profound but deeply moving.

Stump ends her book with an extended explication of Aquinas's understanding of theodicy. It will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed her argument to this point that Aquinas's account is quite similar to her earlier understanding of love and loneliness, which she develops to shape her retelling of the biblical stories. The stories remain crucial not as examples of more determinative philosophical arguments but as accounts of our lives that make Aquinas's philosophical analysis intelligible. Accordingly, Stump's account of Aquinas is not an add-on but a fitting climax to a book that contends that nothing worse can happen to us than that we become permanently alienated from



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ourselves and others, so that it becomes impossible for us to realize that our greatest good as human beings is to be in union with God through love.

Though she characterizes Aquinas's account as his theodicy, she denies that her own position is best described by this term. Rather she characterizes her argument as a defense. According to Stump, a theodicy entails an attempt to defend the consistency of religious belief with uncontested empirical evidence to show that it is not inconsistent for God to allow the kinds of suffering the biblical stories turn on. A defense attempts only to tell a story about God and human suffering that is enough like our actual world that the story could be true as told.

Though I have doubted the usefulness of the enterprise of theodicy and though I remain convinced that certain explanations of evil are evil, Stump's defense has convinced me that through suffering, God would draw us closer to love.

The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris

By David McCullough
Simon and Schuster, 576 pp., \$37.50

In the 1830s most Americans were finding plenty of adventure in their own country. It was just over 50 years old, after all. Some were trudging along the new Oregon Trail; some were pushing Native Americans west of the Mississippi with legislation or guns; others were involved in increasingly volatile arguments over slavery.

But not all Americans were thinking about America. Dozens of young adults were heading east instead of west, across the Atlantic Ocean to France. David McCullough immersed himself in their letters, diaries, lectures and memoirs and has shaped the material into a fine popular history of both individual travelers and the French era that they sailed into.

As McCullough's editor, Michael Korda, said in a *USA Today* interview, McCullough is "driven by stories and by people, not just facts." The result is rich storytelling, with engaging short biographies that are part of a larger narrative of Paris as experienced between 1829, when painter and inventor Samuel Morse crossed the ocean, and 1900, when Paris hosted the Exposition Universelle of 1889.

In many cases the young Americans were aspiring nurses and doctors. Jonathan Mason Warren, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., Elizabeth Blackwell and others wanted formal medical training—and the center for training was Paris. Warren later performed some of the first successful operations using ether; Holmes became a professor and the dean at Harvard Medical School; Blackwell founded an American hospital staffed by women.

Others were artists. Samuel F. B. Morse, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent and Augustus Saint-Gaudens were drawn to Paris seeking inspiration, nurturing of their art and mentors who could help them establish their careers.

Writers came too. James Fenimore Cooper, who was America's most famous author at the time, was followed by Mark Twain, Henry James and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The Americans' knowledge of France and the French was meager, but they cherished the Marquis de Lafayette for his role in America's independence, and in 1830 they waved the French flag in New York to celebrate the July Revolution, which put "citizen king" Louis-Philippe in power (the next revolution was only 18 years away). Many of the Americans had studied Voltaire, Racine and Molière, but most knew little more of France. Some of their parents—especially the Calvinist families of Morse and Holmes—worried about the notorious licentiousness of Paris. The travelers were less worried.

In 1830 the journey to Paris was grim. Steamboats existed but were not yet ready for ocean travel. It took four to six weeks to cross the Atlantic, and travelers were aware of ships that had been

Reviewed by Debra Bendis, *CENTURY* senior editor.

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destroyed by storm or iceberg, including the *Crisis*, an aptly named ship that disappeared en route to the continent. Arriving on the French coast, the Americans were often startled and offended by strict searches of their persons and their baggage by strangers who could not speak English.

But they were even more shocked when the carriage conductor shouted “Voilà Paris!” and they stepped out into the reality of Paris neighborhoods with their medieval tenements tilting toward filthy streets (“mud of an intensity that defies competition,” said Holmes), the unremitting squalor and disease, a healthy and visible rat population, and the clamor of perpetual pedestrian and animal traffic through ancient, narrow passageways. (Georges-Eugène Haussmann would not begin clearing out the medieval neighborhoods and creating the city’s broad boulevards until the 1850s.)

Once they’d found a garret to rent and a teacher or two, the young Americans adjusted quickly. Aspiring doctors and nurses gained permission to study at the new École de Médecine, where they were fascinated by lectures on dozens of topics. There were only 21 medical schools in the United States, each with a staff of only five or six professors; aspiring doctors more often apprenticed themselves to practitioners. At the École, enrollment sometimes rose to 5,000, and students could accompany doctors on their rounds and observe surgeries (most surgery patients died as a result of infection).

The aspiring artists were stunned, and sometimes shocked, by French openness toward art. The public swamped the museums on Sundays, and women as well as men were present, many of them diligently making copies of the great works.

Several stories within McCullough’s larger story are especially engrossing. One is the biography of Saint-Gaudens, who sailed for Paris with a hundred dollars at the age of 19 and toiled relentlessly to create a sculpture of Abraham Lincoln for Chicago, the *Amor Caritas* for New York’s Madison Square Garden and the Shaw Memorial for Boston.

Another story is that of American minister to France Elihu B. Washburne, who was scorned by many in the U.S. as unfit for his role but who earned respect for his courage and level-headedness. During the 131-day siege of Paris by the Germans in 1871, more than 65,000 people died, many of hunger. Washburne considered it his duty to stay in Paris through this most difficult and frightening of times and to extend such aid and advocacy as he could.

In spite of the madness, travel hardships, homesickness and vocational failures, most of those who went to Paris fell in love with the city. The joie de vivre that draws the world to Paris today seems to have begun with the young adults who arrived beginning in the 1830s and said, in the words of artist Robert Henri, “Paris! We are here. . . . We feel our speechlessness keenly.” The cultural appreciation of dining, the elegance and accessibility of public parks and museums, the fascination with architec-

tural and artistic riches—all of these were absorbed by the Americans, who took their enthusiasm and new knowledge home to share.

Their careers progressed, stalled or took detours (Morse’s painting career is barely remembered; his telegraph was a transatlantic sensation), but none of them ever forgot the influence of Paris. “There are few things bought with money that are more delightful than a French breakfast,” wrote Nathaniel Parker Willis as a correspondent for the *New York Mirror*. “At last I have come into a dreamland,” said Stowe. Cassatt, whom Edgar Degas invited into the Impressionist circle, said of her time in Paris: “I began to live.” Meanwhile, Americans back home would soon begin to hear of the travelers’ inspiring contributions and accomplishments: the establishment of the world’s finest medical training centers, an expansive portfolio of American art and literature and a golden era of invention.

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While the CENTURY is no longer publishing an end-of-year index of articles, the CENTURY website offers something more flexible and powerful: **searchable archives**. Each page includes a search bar in the upper right-hand corner. Search results can be sorted by title, author or date; they can also be filtered by keyword or subject area.

For example, maybe you recall reading an article that discusses creation in terms of all the “stuff” God made, but you can’t remember much more than that. So you **SEARCH** for “stuff.”

The screenshot shows the search results for the keyword "stuff". On the left, there are filters by section (Books, Ministry, Arts & Culture, News, Politics & Society, Life of Faith, Theology) and by keywords (lectionary, ordinary time, pastoral ministry, etc.). The main content area shows a list of search results. The top result is "The inextinguishable desire for more" by John M. Buchanan, dated Oct 21, 2006. Below it is a "NEWS" section with the headline "Former White House aide says Bush failed on 'poor people stuff.'" and a sub-headline "The White House gets what the White House really wants." dated Mar 06, 2005. The article snippet mentions David Luo, who left the position in December 2003, and his criticism of the White House's support for faith-based initiatives.

2

This pulls up a lot of results, so **SORT** them by date to see recent content first.

The screenshot shows the search results sorted by date. The top result is "Living in a Material World: God's Good Stuff" by Michael Lindvall, dated Jul 13, 2010. The article snippet discusses the author's experience as a pastor in New York City and his reflection on the concept of "stuff" and materialism. Below the article list, there is a "SORT BY" dropdown menu with options: Relevancy, Title, Type, Author, and Date. The "Date" option is selected.

3

Now **FILTER** the results by “theology” to narrow down the list. This pushes the article in question, Michael Lindvall’s “Living in a Material World: God’s Good Stuff,” into the top two items.

The screenshot shows the search results filtered by the keyword "theology". The left sidebar shows the "FILTER BY KEYWORDS" section with "theology" selected. The main content area shows a list of search results. The top result is "Living in a material world" by Michael Lindvall, dated Jul 13, 2010. The article snippet discusses the author's experience as a pastor in New York City and his reflection on the concept of "stuff" and materialism. Below the article list, there is a "FEATURED" section with the headline "Living in a material world" and a sub-headline "God's good stuff".

If you have any questions, contact the CENTURY at main@christiancentury.org.

Tolstoy and the Purple Chair: My Year of Magical Reading

By Nina Sankovitch
HarperCollins, 256 pp., \$23.99

The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared

By Alice Ozma
Grand Central Publishing, 320 pp.,
\$14.99 paperback

To read a story well, Ursula Le Guin has written, “is to follow it, to act it, to feel it, to become it.” Reading is an act of “absorbed alertness,” she says, “not all that different from hunting, in fact, or from gathering.”

Two reading memoirs, one focused on reading as an accompaniment to grief and the other about the read-aloud journey of a daughter and father, record two distinct experiences of such absorption. If reading is hunting and gathering, then these memoirs are dispatches from two foragers, notes regarding the labors and satisfactions of subsisting on books.

Nina Sankovitch, author of *Tolstoy and the Purple Chair*, situates her reading as a way to mourn her sister’s death from cancer at age 46. In a sprint away from grief and survivor’s guilt, Sankovitch first threw herself into a frenzy of work and caregiving for her four sons, her husband and her father. Three years later, as she contemplated turning 46 herself, Sankovitch hatched a book-a-day-for-a-year plan as a way to “answer the relentless question of why I deserved to live.” It became, she says, a “year in a sanatorium . . . away from the unhealthy air of anger and grief with which I’d filled my life.”

Mining literature for therapeutic purposes tracks a long history, and Sankovitch chose her counselors well: Soyinka, Camus, Proulx, Buechner, Dillard, Russo. She is adept at stitching together musings about the books she is reading with memory and narrative from her own life, which includes harrowing stories from her immigrant parents’ lives in Belarus and Belgium during World War II and tales of her own childhood in Illinois and of parenting her four sons.

Turning to books as companions

through grief is not where Sankovitch goes wrong. The false note in her memoir comes from her reliance on the “my year of” conceit. Although it has produced some impressive writing—Judith Levine’s *Not Buying It* and A. J. Jacobs’s *The Year of Living Biblically* come to mind—this memoir trope works better with a light topic that has the ballast of occasional poignancy or personal growth or social commentary, rather than with a weighty topic like loss. Sankovitch never explains why she “needed to read a book a day,” as opposed to a book a week, as her husband suggested, or a certain number of hours each day, both of which would have allowed her to read deeply, gently, meditatively. Grief itself is a slow, recursive project, and at times the “my year of” theme feels like an outsized gimmick has been wrangled onto the spine of what could have been a moving memoir of reading, grief and memory.

Sankovitch set up her reading year as the antidote both to her grief over her sister’s death and her resultant furiously scheduled life—“I had spent the last three years running and racing, filling my life and the lives of everyone in my family with activity and plans and movement, constant movement.” She suggests that books helped her stop running. Yet she never seems to consider that reading a book every 24 hours is another version of her previous frenetic pace rather than a departure from it. Not only did she read a book a day during her year of “magical reading”; she posted a review of each book on her website *ReadAllDay.org*, which was designed to encourage adults to read for pleasure and certainly helped her attract a literary agent.

Sankovitch outlines the strictures that her plan dictated—choosing a book generally of 300 pages or fewer, reading it within four hours and writing her review in two—and she occasionally records the panic she felt when sitting down to start her book for a particular day at ten at night. But nowhere does she examine the difference between the fever-pitch pace of reading necessitated by her project and what Sven Birkerts has called “the slow and meditative possession of a

*Reviewed by Valerie Weaver-Zercher, a writer
and editor in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.*

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book.” Were there any losses associated with inhaling books at the rate of one a day, any sense of shortchanging the authors who had so painstakingly crafted them? Did she ever wish she could have lazed around in one book for, say, three days, rather than giving herself to the next, and the next, and the next? If reading is akin to hunting and gathering, as Le Guin writes, then rushing through it might mean returning to camp with fewer provisions.

It’s been said that anything truly worth reading is worth reading slowly. The voluntary practice of slow reading—a phrase that’s been around at least since 1887, when Nietzsche described himself as a “teacher of slow reading”—is gaining attention recently, especially as it intersects with other slow movements like slow food and slow parenting. Digital reading encourages us to become fast scanners rather than deep readers, extracting the information we desire and quickly moving on. “When you accelerate things that should not be accelerated,

when you forget how to slow down, there is a price to pay,” writes Carl Honoré, author of the best-selling *In Praise of Slow*, who recommends deliberately slow reading as one method of dealing with the hyperactivity of late modernity.

Readers will need to calculate the costs and benefits of both society’s and Sankovitch’s fast reading. My curmudgeonly response to her memoir may grow from the fact that I read *Tolstoy and the Purple Chair* in less than 24 hours, a little experiment I undertook as a way to explore Sankovitch’s method as well as her content. The cost of my own accelerated reading may have been a more generous treatment of one author’s heartfelt journey through literature and loss. It is possible that I skated too quickly over the surface of her book’s deep waters, thus missing nuance and wave and the play of light. I do wonder, however, what Sankovitch might have achieved, in terms of both writing and healing, had she chosen Birkerts’s “slow and meditative possession” of books

rather than the more marketable 365-books-in-one-year approach. Truisms garnered from her year—“I have learned, through books, to hold on to my memories of all the beautiful moments and people in my life”—might have been transfigured into insights less easily packaged, meditations more carefully crafted.

I read Alice Ozma’s memoir, *The Reading Promise*, more slowly, so my favorable response to it may have less to do with any difference in the quality of these memoirs than with the differing amount of time I spent absorbed in them. Ozma’s memoir feels less jerry-built than Sankovitch’s, and the fact that it was written by a 22-year-old makes the achievement more stunning.

While Sankovitch’s work centers almost entirely on solitary reading, Ozma’s memoir revolves around shared reading. She recounts the “Reading Streak” that she and her father achieved between the time she was nine years old and the day she left for college. What began as a short-term promise to themselves—that her father would read aloud to her for 100 consecutive nights—stretched to eight years as they read together for at least ten minutes every night. Ozma writes of the roadblocks they encountered along the way—a case of laryngitis for her father, slumber parties where he had to read to her over the phone, her preteen embarrassment about their habit, the late-night play practice in high school that threatened to run past midnight. “Reading was sacred, traditional, perennial,” Ozma writes of their practice. “I could hardly remember when the reading began (we’d read for years before officially starting The Streak) and I certainly couldn’t imagine where it would end. Neither could he.” Ozma and her father managed to continue their streak uninterrupted for 3,218 nights.

Ozma’s project is not without its own contrivances. Its snappy dialogue may represent less her actual childhood self and more the image of a precocious child that she wants to convey. Her prose sometimes feels evasive of emotional territory, and her mention late in the book that as a child she once found her mother on the kitchen floor, having overdosed on antidepressants after an extra-

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marital affair gone wrong, may make a reader wonder whether the texture of her childhood could have been as comic as she makes it sound. She is a wickedly funny storyteller, and the chapter about her fear of the corpse of John F. Kennedy begs to be read aloud: "I couldn't appreciate it then, but it takes creativity to lie shivering and shaking in your bed, wondering if your cats know how to defend you, not against ghosts or the boogeyman, but against the immobile body of one of the most famous and beloved ex-presidents of the United States."

Though Ozma's prose occasionally drowns in anecdote and witticism, her project feels less fabricated than Sankovitch's, perhaps in part because the Reading Streak is only a grander version of what happens in countless households every night: parents sharing books with children. Ozma and her father have taken a practice that marks many parent-child relationships and elaborated it, adding doggedness and discipline and a dose of eccentricity. Sankovitch's reading com-

mitment, on the other hand, necessitates a luxury—six hours a day to devote to books—that few of us can imagine and fewer could ever arrange. Ozma's book is potentially the story of Everyreader; Sankovitch's most definitely is not.

Ozma also resists the elevated gesture that gets Sankovitch in occasional trouble. Sankovitch never argues with the books or authors or characters that inhabit her days; they are always sources of pleasure, wonder, guidance and hope. Ozma, however, manages to situate reading as simply a natural part of life rather than a transcendent good. She is not afraid to record the times when reading is not a miracle salve, such as the evening her sister leaves for a year abroad and she and her father are missing her intensely. That night they are reading *The Secret Garden*, and Ozma finds that the orphan heroine, Mary, is distant and unhelpful. Mary "could discover a garden or stay in her room and play checkers, for all I cared," Ozma writes. "The fact that she was also coping with loss—a different sort

of loss, of course—didn't occur to me. Even if it had, it wouldn't have moved me. She was not real, and reality was weighing heavily on my chest, keeping my attention away from the garden where things had the potential to grow and get better."

The Reading Promise is ultimately a testament to one father's passion for reading and his commitment to passing it on to his children. An elementary school librarian for 38 years, Ozma's father was thwarted in his efforts to read aloud to his students when the principals of the schools where he worked dictated that library time be increasingly given over to computer instruction. He was eventually told to put many of the books that he had carefully chosen into storage and even to remove reading from his lesson plans altogether.

Ozma, who was in college when her father retired, writes with sadness and anger about his defense of books within an educational system marked by testing, digitization and budget cuts: "My father felt as though he were being put on trial, and saw his passion for inspiring children

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to read become antiquated, quaint—obsolete.” She compares his fate with that of a character in a dystopian episode of *The Twilight Zone* who is sentenced to death for being a librarian. Her father “was not about to receive capital punishment, of course, but for a man who had devoted his life to books, watching these items become irrelevant was as close to a death sentence as he had ever come.”

Neither Ozma nor Sankovitch writes

of faith, nor do they suggest that they adhere to any belief system at all. Neither fully examines the so-called death of books, nor do they report the good news that literary reading among adults is rising. Still, both hint at the sacredness of the reading act and the almost religious sensations that it can provoke. Both record the sustenance afforded by foraging among books, with their astonishingly nutritive power.

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Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective

By David C. Steinmetz

Oxford University Press, 200 pp., \$21.95 paperback

Steinmetz is a senior scholar who can distill his learning in graceful, compact essays. The articles collected here appeared in various journals, including the *CENTURY*. Most grow out of the author’s research on the Reformation, his primary field, but all have a broader horizon and bring the historian’s insight to issues of wide significance, such as the use of inclusive language for God and arguments over intelligent design. In “The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis,” Steinmetz makes clear (with pertinent historical examples) that the modern quest to determine the one, original meaning of a scriptural text is naive and inconsistent with the best practices of the church. His summary of the Reformers’ views of conversion and repentance leads Steinmetz to affirm, with Luther and Calvin, that “only those who love God can hate sin,” which means, paradoxically, that “only a saint can know what sin is” and hence “real repentance is an activity of the spiritually mature.”

Left Behind and Loving It: A Cheeky Look at the End Times

By D. Mark Davis

Cascade, 130 pp., \$16.00 paperback

Presbyterian pastor Mark Davis offers deft and humorous biblical and theological readings of “Left Behind Theology” that speak to the anxiety at work in the culture shaped by apocalyptic texts. Davis rightfully sees a strange sort of identity crisis afoot, a “passive-aggressive prophesying.” *CENTURY* readers may think there have already been many debunkings of rapture theology, both earnest and sarcastic. But this one is funny. For people interested in the weird intersection of the Bible and American culture, this book does the trick of making you see better because you laugh more.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson

FOREWORD BY Jim Wallis

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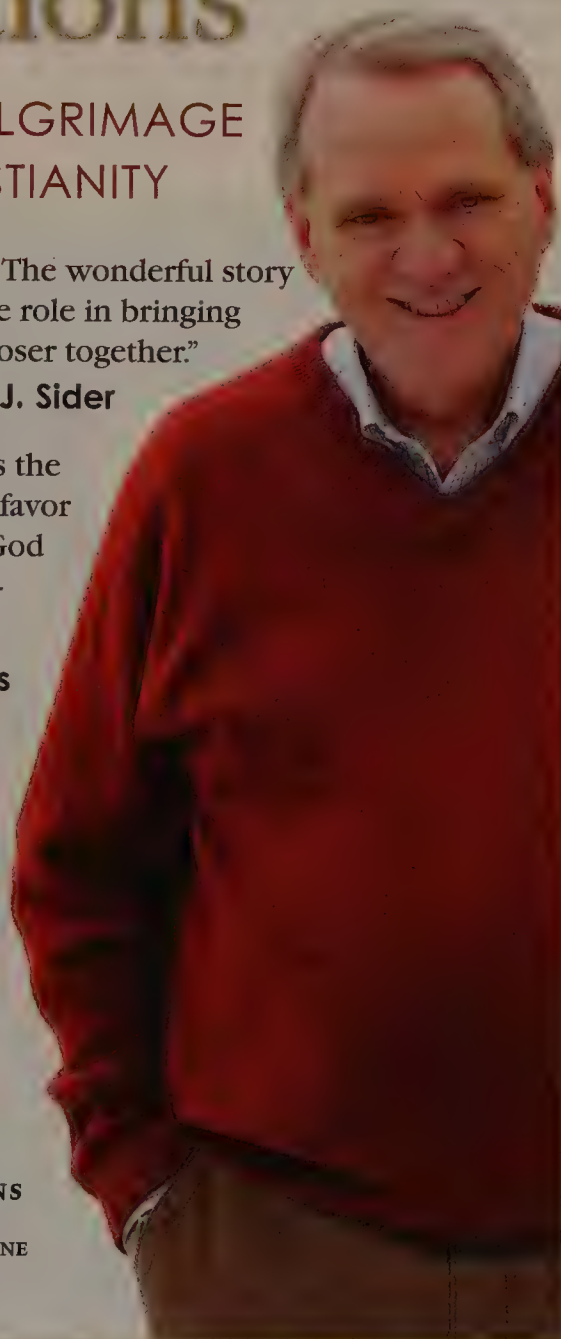
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Margaret

Written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan
Starring Anna Paquin, Matt Damon, Mark Ruffalo and J. Smith-Cameron



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AFTERMATH: Lisa Cohen (Anna Paquin, right) and her family, including her mother (J. Smith-Cameron, center), must deal with the repercussions of a fatal car accident that the teen inadvertently caused.

Depending on your tolerance or affection for epic morality plays, Kenneth Lonergan's *Margaret* may either feel too long and subplot-laden, with one too many plot twists, or a bit thin and sketchy (despite a running time of two and a half hours). This mixed response may stem from the fact that the film was shot in 2005 and is just now being released, following some byzantine battles in the editing room. Whichever side you come down on, *Margaret* is nothing if not spiritually ambitious.

The story revolves around 17-year-old Lisa Cohen (Anna Paquin), a smart if slightly annoying girl who lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with her younger brother and actress mother, Joan (J. Smith-Cameron). She attends a private school on partial scholarship and seems to be going through many teen rites of passage—challenging authority, bonding with sensitive teachers, exercising her sexual allure and generally being as difficult as possible.

One day, while shopping for a cowboy hat, she spots a bus driver (Mark Ruffalo) wearing one and tries to get his attention. He notices her waving at him and laughingly responds, which leads to a gruesome accident in which a woman crossing the street is run over by the bus. Lisa cradles the woman's head in her arms as the woman dies.

The film becomes an extended study of Lisa's response to the accident. It surveys the advice she receives from various

adults, the decisions she makes (and sometimes sticks with) and how her buried grief and sense of injustice eat away at her and spill into the lives of those around her.

The cast of characters include police officers, representatives of the bus company, her classmates, a boy who has a crush on her, a boy she agrees to have sex with, her teachers (Matt Damon, Matthew Broderick), her mother, her estranged father, the dead woman's best friend, the bus driver and his family, the dead woman's distant cousin, her mother's new South American boyfriend, a few lawyers and a few members of the Metropolitan Opera of New York. Ergo, the lengthy running time.

The best way to understand what writer-director Lonergan (*You Can Count on Me*) is up to may be to examine the film's title. The film has no character named Margaret, and the only time the name shows up is during one of Lisa's English literature classes in reference to the poem "Spring and Fall," by the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. The poem is about a young girl who is distraught over the dying of the leaves; it ends with the lovely couplet, "It is the blight man was born for / It is Margaret you mourn for."

The film seems to be suggesting that Lisa, the movie's "Margaret," is both naive and admirable in how she tries to process the woman's death. Though it

would be easy to pass the buck to the bus driver, or fate, or life in the big city, that option doesn't satisfy her. Though she is told repeatedly that the adults in her life know best when it comes to issues of the law and personal responsibility, the death gnaws away at her core. She has a gut feeling that whatever is being done in response isn't enough.

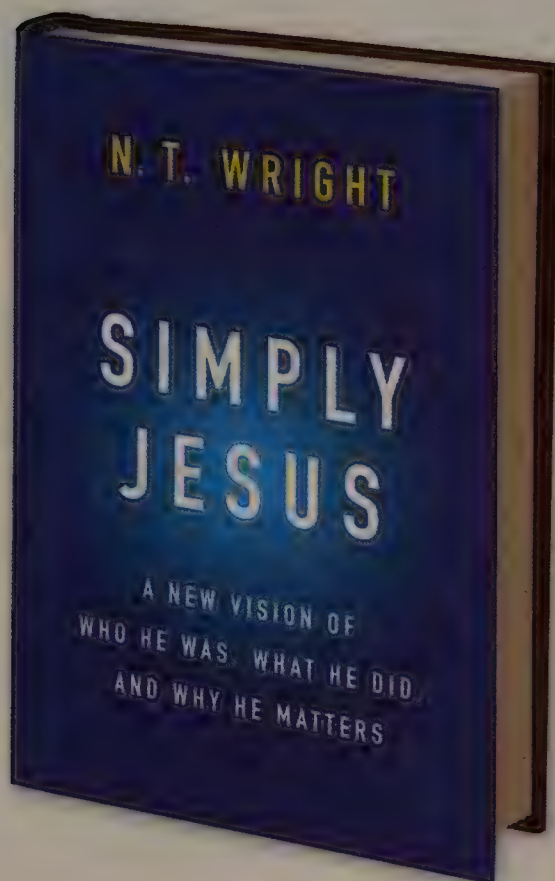
It's not that people don't want to do the right thing, it's that the existence of right or wrong or good or bad is not nearly as clear as Lisa needs it to be. This ambiguity gets finessed even further in other classroom scenes that include a heated debate about Shakespeare's intent in one of his plays and another debate about America's political role in the Middle East.

Margaret is not an easy film to digest. It is a smorgasbord of stories and ideas, with the links between them oftentimes cloudy. Watching it is like participating in a heated discussion about whether the universe makes sense and whether the question is even worth pursuing. Lonergan seems to be suggesting that it is up to the young among us to question the nature of right and wrong. Their inquiries may seem naive to their more experienced elders, but if the young don't ask such questions, who will?

Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

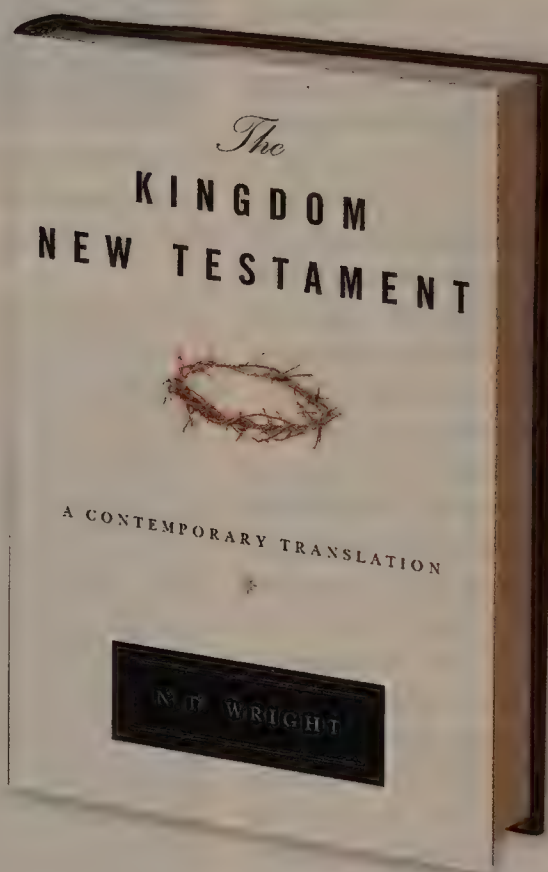
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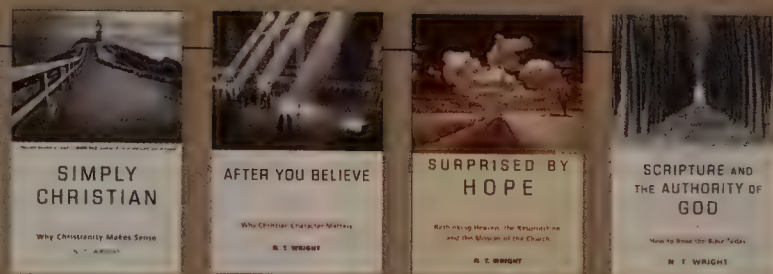
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by Philip Jenkins

Martin Luther has many claims to fame. In recent years I have found him useful in an unexpected way: as a guide to understanding emerging African Christianity. Here is my unscientific rule: if Martin Luther treated a biblical book with disdain or outright hostility, then that book is really popular in modern Africa.

As a Bible scholar, Luther was a perceptive and quite daring critic. He tested the authority of books by their claims to apostolic authority and judged their faithfulness against what he considered the core teachings of the earliest church. By this standard, he argued that four New Testament books in particu-

such as that of the lamb, the throne and the blood of the innocent crying out for justice in time of persecution. James is appealing because of its use of traditional Wisdom themes and its profound sense of the fragility of life. Across Africa and Asia, poor believers resonate easily with the teaching that life is a vapor, a mist that rises and fades away. Even the seemingly slight book of Jude offers a stirring call to action among second-generation believers who are tempted to compromise with the surrounding culture and its pagan religions—a situation as threatening in Africa in 2011 as it

puzzle Westerners. Although he drew on both English and French cultural sources, he wanted above all to formulate a distinctively African theology. Just as such ancient pioneers as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria rooted the faith in the Hellenistic and Roman cultures of their day, so Bediako strove to establish a firmly African context for the surging African Christianity of the late 20th century.

For Bediako, Hebrews was significant because of its elaborate discussion of blood sacrifice and its relationship to the Christian proclamation.

modern audiences often find concepts of sacrifice and atonement irrelevant or even shocking. At best, they are of archaeological interest.

That dismissive Western attitude contrasts sharply with the perspective in Africa, where the idea of blood sacrifice is deeply entrenched and is the backdrop to any Christian theological debates over atonement and justification. Bediako wrote in a society with a “deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function.” In Ghana, the turning points of the year were marked by the purification ritual of the Odwira, with its attendant sacrifices.

Now, though, Christians have proclaimed that these rites are obsolete. As Bediako wrote, they “have in fact been fulfilled and transcended by the one, perfect Odwira that Jesus Christ has performed once for all. . . . The Odwira to end all Odwiras has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews thus becomes a decisive weapon for African Christians who are appalled by the idea that importing blood sacrifice into the churches would represent a valuable form of inculturation. The book is a manifesto warning against the slightest concession to syncretism. Amazing as it might seem to Europeans in Luther’s time or afterward, Hebrews still speaks today.

Four New Testament books that Martin Luther disdained are very popular in Africa today.

lar—Revelation, Hebrews, James and Jude—fell short of true canonical status and should be printed separately in future versions of the Bible.

In different ways, each of these books enjoys enormous popularity in Africa. Each speaks to the harsh conditions in which believers must live: conditions of poverty, social fragility and political oppression; a world in which vestiges of older religions still flourish; a world of complex religious coexistence.

Far from being repelled by the fantastic elements in Revelation, modern African scholars find the book startlingly familiar, with images

was in the Mediterranean world around 100 AD.

The epistle to the Hebrews is a rich exercise in theology that actually has deep roots in African soil. Written no later than the third century, Hebrews was cherished in the Roman churches of Carthage and North Africa, where believers credited it to Paul’s associate Barnabas. Some modern African thinkers find special treasures in Hebrews to the point that the brilliant Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako (who died in 2008) praised it as “OUR Epistle”—that is, Africa’s.

Bediako’s intellectual credentials gave special weight to an evaluation that might

Hebrews assumes deep knowledge of the Jewish temple ritual, and its author knows a great deal about the practical minutiae of sacrificial rituals: he knows, for example, that sacrificial blood is not just shed, it is sprinkled. His core message, though, is that these sacrifices have been superseded by the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Christ, the ultimate high priest, is the culmination and conclusion of all sacrifices.

As the temple cult ceased after the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD, those arguments became less significant to later believers, and

Philip Jenkins’s Notes from the Global church appears in every other issue.

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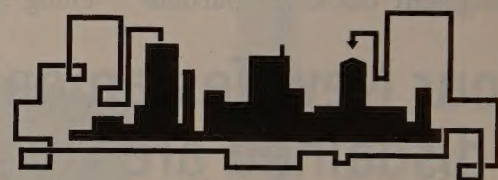
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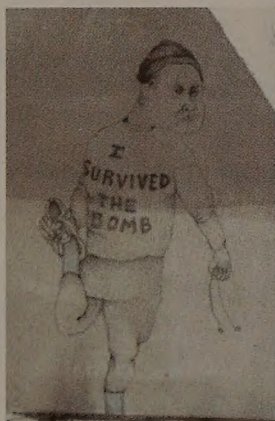
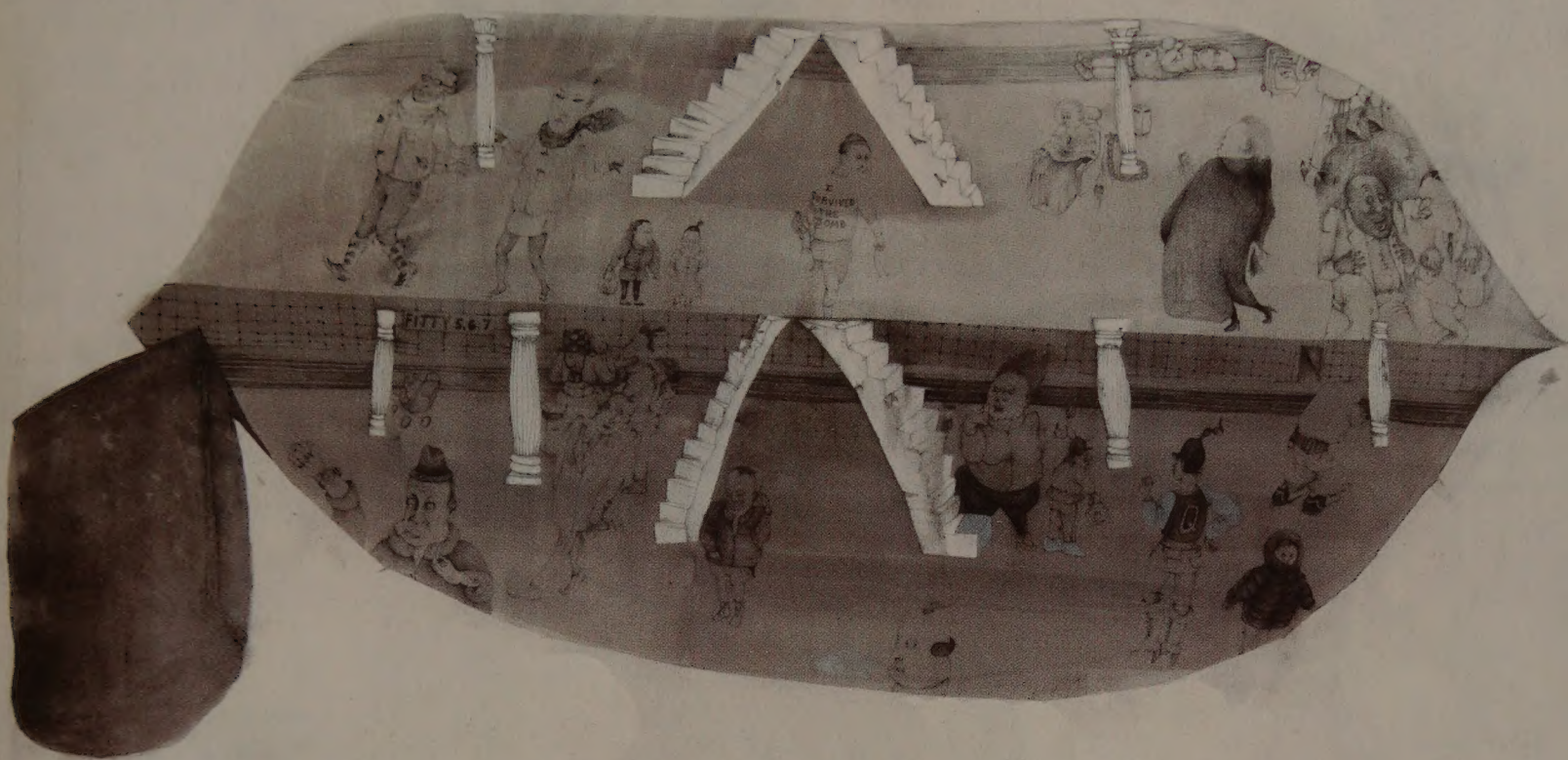
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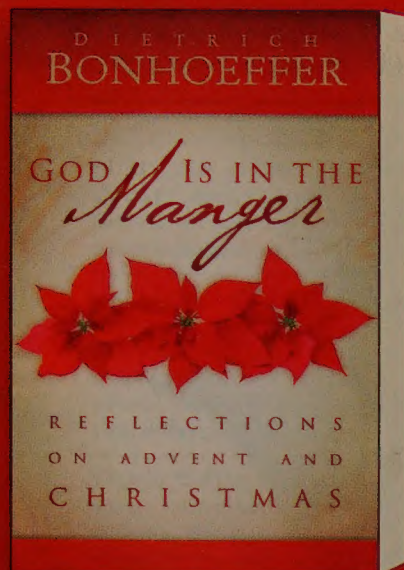
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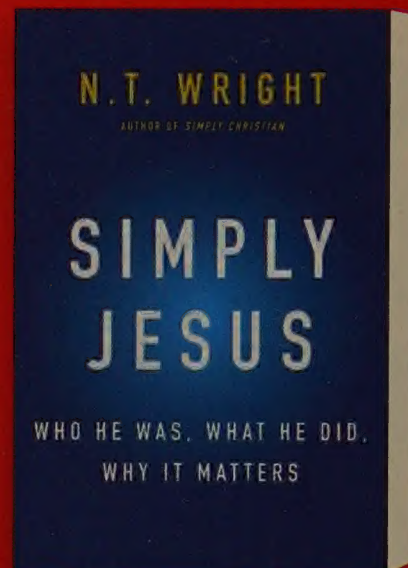


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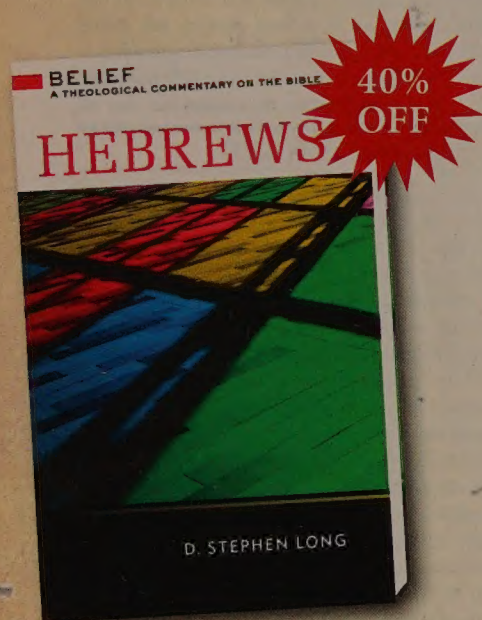


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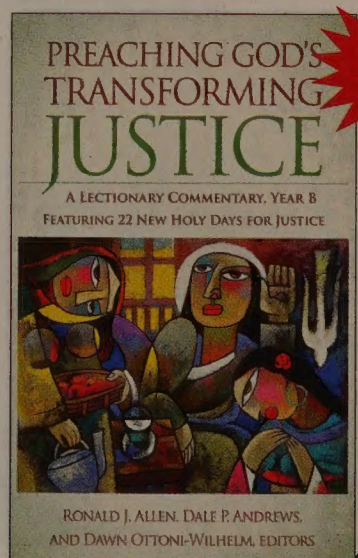
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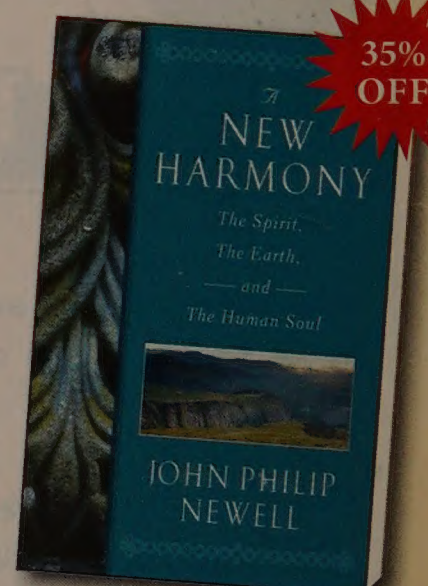
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